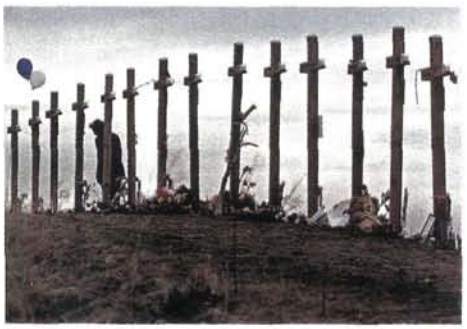
LIGHTS, CAMERA, GOD
MATTHEW BERKE • ROD DREHER

the weekly
Standard

APRIL 24 / MAY 1, 2000 $3.95

Columbine
ONE YEAR LATER



What If We Had Taken It Seriously?
DAVID B. KOPEL

Among the Crusaders
MATT LABASH

The Surprising Politics of Gun Control
FRED BARNES

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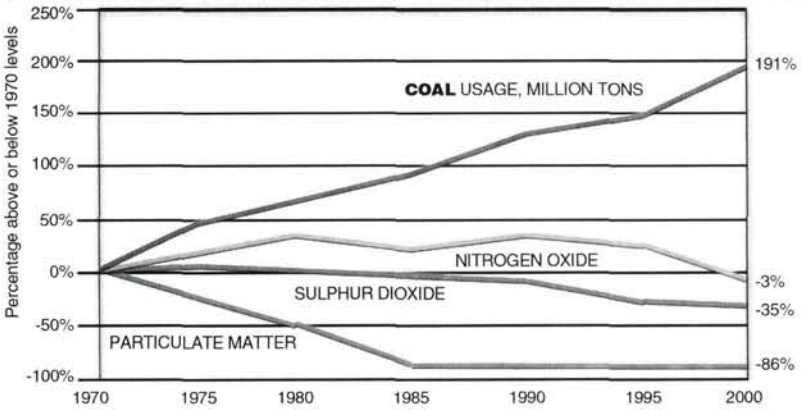
Emissions from Coal-based Electricity Generation Since 1970



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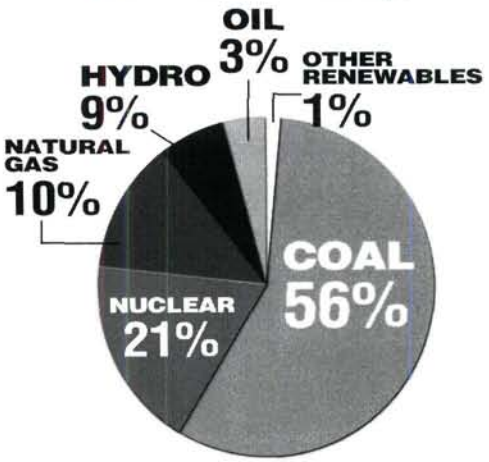

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THIS IS A COMBINED ISSUE. THE NEXT ISSUE OF THE WEEKLY STANDARD WILL APPEAR IN TWO WEEKS.

Contents

April 24 / May 1, 2000 • Volume 5, Number 31

2 Scrapbook ..... *A biased source and 1.6 gallon flushes.*

4 Casual ..... *Christopher Caldwell, tree-dweller.*

6 Correspondence .... *On Elián and the vanishing voter.*

9 Editorials ..... *Lázaro González, American Hero*
China's Trade Deal—Why Rush?

Articles

11 On the Miami Barricades *Little Havana stands firm, while Janet Reno backpedals*..... BY TUCKER CARLSON

12 Have Gun, Will Vote *It turns out guns are more popular than gun control*..... BY FRED BARNES

14 Al Gore in the Balance *They're reissuing the vice president's book, and that's good news for Bush*..... BY IRWIN M. STELZER

17 Plus Ça Change . . . *Our bullying, biased, and unreliable peacekeeping partner in Kosovo*..... BY STEPHEN SCHWARTZ

Features

20 What If We Had Taken Columbine Seriously?
The political discourse since has been foolish, escapist, and cowardly..... BY DAVID B. KOPEL

26 Among the Crusaders
A Columbine father, an Illinois carpenter, and their evangelical roadshow..... BY MATT LABASH

30 The Boy Scouts' Day in Court
The Supreme Court hears a high stakes case over gay scoutmasters..... BY JOE LOCONTE

Books & Arts

35 L.A. Confidential *David Geffen's life in Hollywood*..... BY ANDREW FERGUSON

38 Lights, Camera, God I *Moses at the movies*..... BY MATTHEW BERKE

41 Lights, Camera, God II *Jesus Christ on celluloid*..... BY ROD DREHER

44 Parody..... *ABC News memo to Leo DiCaprio.*

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the weekly Standard

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Source, or Witness for the Defense?

Last week's *Washington Post* interview with independent counsel Robert Ray has occasioned a torrent of chatter: about Ray's active consideration of criminal charges against Bill Clinton once he leaves office, about the propriety of such charges, about the possibility that Al Gore might pardon his predecessor. And so on.

What has not inspired much talk are the failings of the *Post* story, the paper's April 11 lead, as a piece of journalism. It was 22 paragraphs long. Paragraphs seven and eight, appearing right after the "jump" to an inside page, contained the story's lone quotation from anyone other than Ray. This much was not unusual. The solitary "Greek chorus" quotation is a standard convention of newspaper interviews: the device by which reporters and editors signal their readers how an ordinary, sensible fellow—if he were better informed—would and should react to the surrounding disclosures. Here the *Post*'s chosen Greek chorister described Ray's potential indictment of Clinton as a regrettable symptom of prosecutorial neurosis:

"I believe the great majority of Americans fervently wish that this matter was behind them and they will be chagrined by the news," one Reid Weingarten told the *Post*. "I, however, have a great deal of experience with independent counsels, and I am not the least bit surprised that this one, like so many others, has great difficulty in closing the book."

The *Post* identified Weingarten only as a "former senior trial attorney in the Justice Department's public integrity section" who is now "a Washington defense attorney."

Except that Weingarten—described with greater precision—is actually a member of the highly organized army of lawyers who make handsome fortunes defending Bill Clinton's allied Democratic nightcrawlers against persistent criminal charges. Among Weingarten's former or current clients are Charlie Trie, Teamsters ex-president Ron Carey, the family of late commerce secretary Ron Brown, mystery donor Pauline Kanchanalak, and . . .

And former agriculture secretary Mike Espy, whom Robert Ray once helped prosecute. Reid Weingarten, in other words, gets *paid* to criticize the likes of Robert Ray.

THE SCRAPBOOK can't decide which is more embarrassing: that the *Post* felt Weingarten's stand-alone views were appropriate for inclusion in the Ray story in the first place—or that, having made that questionable decision, the paper declined to reveal to its readers Weingarten's patent bias. ♦

Flushed Without Success

Perhaps the most important piece of legislation Congress will consider this year came before a House subcommittee last week. We're referring, of course, to the repeal of the infamous 1992 law mandating that all new toilet fixtures in America use no more than a stingy 1.6 gallons per flush—less than half the abundant 3.5 gallons that had been the American standard, as it were, until then.

Despite propaganda to the contrary from the plumbing companies—the hidden force who joined with enviros to produce the regulation—the new johnnies don't get the job done. In practice, 1.6 gallons per flush means 1.6 gallons times two or three. Yet the usual congressional suspects who whine about the government sticking its nose into America's bedrooms are okay with a federal hand on the flush lever.

We're not alone in our displeasure. A National Association of Homebuilders poll on the matter found that 72 percent of those surveyed were unhappy with the fixtures. "The message is clear and straightforward," says representative Joe Knollenberg, a Michigan Republican and sponsor of the repeal. "Get the federal government out of my bathroom." Or, as Ben Lieberman, a leading toilet expert at the Competitive Enterprise Institute in Washington, puts it, "A federal government that believes it has the right and the need to set design standards for toilets is a government losing sight of its limits."

Sadly, the bill didn't even make it out of the subcommittee, as two Republicans—Heather Wilson and Michael Bilirakis—joined 11 Democrats in voting 13-12 to preserve current law. We repeat our mantra on this issue: The Republican Congress shouldn't accept the low-flush mandate sitting down. It should wipe this inane regulation off the books. This could be the beginning of a great movement. ♦

Letter from Al

Bad news for the Gore campaign. For months, campaign advisers have had the vice president moving his headquarters from Washington to Nashville, moving from dark suits to light suits, moving from loafers to cowboy boots. But despite all the retooling (or perhaps because of it) 50 percent of voters, according to a recent *Washington Post*/ABC News poll, think Gore is "insincere and somewhat phony."

Maybe they've been watching his campaign events. One of THE SCRAPBOOK's favorite such came last week in Charlotte, North Carolina, where Gore explained to a bunch of eighth-graders

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that he had gone to fight as a journalist in Vietnam because, though he believed the war was wrong, "If I didn't go, someone else would have to go in my place." Plus there was the fact—which he didn't tell the students—that his father, an opponent of the war, was in a desperate struggle to keep his Tennessee Senate seat that year (1970), and a peacenik son wouldn't have been good for the family business.

Gore's actual state of mind when he joined the Army can perhaps better be gauged by the letter he wrote to his parents that year shortly before he enlisted (a letter they astutely gave to the *New Yorker* just after the 1994 elections, when the political damage it might have done had it leaked during a campaign was minimized): "My own belief," wrote young Al, "is that this form of psychological ailment [anti-communism]—in this case a national madness—leads the victim to actually create the thing which is feared the most. It strikes me that this is precisely what the U.S. has been doing. Creating—and if not creating, energetically supporting—fascist, totalitarian regimes in the name of fighting totalitarianism. . . . For me, the best example of all is the U.S. Army."

Gore successfully laughed this off at the time as crazy, college-student thinking that he was cured of by joining the Army. Funny then that, unlike his more recent statements, this one actually sounds deeply felt—sincere and not phony at all. ♦

The Cold War, According to Ted

The controversial 24-part series *Cold War*, produced by CNN, is now being foisted on classrooms across America thanks to the self-interested philanthropy of CNN honcho Ted Turner and his *turnerlearning.com*. While students will learn some important things about the Berlin airlift and the Prague uprising of 1968, the segments focusing on McCarthyism and the Vietnam war are tendentious in the predictable direction. For needed balance, educators may want to order as a companion volume *CNN's Cold War Documentary: Issues and Controversy*, published by Hoover Institution Press and edited by Hoover fellow Arnold Beichman (who reviewed the CNN series in the Nov. 2, 1998 WEEKLY STANDARD). The book offers essays from such distinguished scholars as Robert Conquest and Richard Pipes and a fuller picture of the Cold War, including the parts that CNN slighted—say, the role of celebrities like "Hanoi Jane" Fonda (before she was Mrs. Turner) in cheerleading for the North Vietnamese. ♦

Witticism of the Week

Q: What is the difference between the English and American peoples?

A: Number one: We speak English and you don't. Number two: When we hold a world championship for a particular sport, we invite teams from other countries. Number three: When you meet the head of state in England, you only have to go down on one knee.

—John Cleese, quoted in the London *Daily Telegraph*, April 3, 2000

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Casual

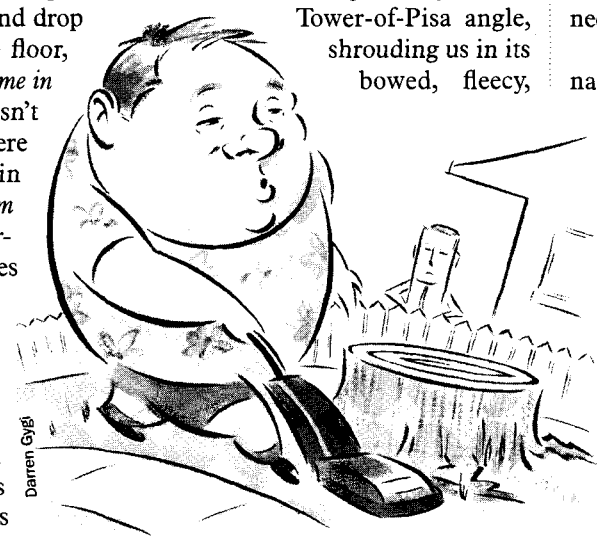
STUMPED

When I was first married and looking for a place to live, my father said, "Get as much house as you can, because you're going to be in it for a lot longer than you think."

That turned out to be not much house. The cheapest habitable structure we saw was $25,000 beyond our budget. It was inhabited by a divorcé going through a blue period, the kind of blue period that leads men to put out cigarettes on the carpets and drop half-drunk beer cans on the floor, figuring, *I'll pick that up sometime in the next few months.* There wasn't much furniture, and what there was was sad: a work bench in the living room (*Now that I'm divorced, I can work on my carpentry!*), a few mattresses shoved up against the walls, streaked near the pillows with years of accumulated scalp grease. The wallpaper—of a cute, kiddie type obviously picked out when the guy had a family—was coming unhung in the upstairs bedrooms. If the interior was Balzac, the yard was Naipaul. It had "gone back to bush," with sumac, thistles, poison ivy, and saplings growing out of the steps. But still too expensive for us.

Six months later, we got a call from the broker. *Not a single person* had expressed an interest in even visiting it. If we came in $25,000 low, we could snag it. And we did. We now had a fixer-upper. Too bad we didn't have any up-fixing abilities. All we could do was start throwing stuff out and hire someone to clear the forest in which the house lay buried.

And we were astonished at what we saw. We had what they call in the classifieds *a gorgeous home*, even a stately one. The problems had all been superficial. Before his rough patch, the guy had planted six varieties of azalea (heretofore invisible behind sumac), put in new casement windows (invisible under grime), and installed new kitchen countertops (invisible under pizza boxes and months-old pots of stiff macaroni). Best of all, he'd built a porch off the dining room that was almost completely enveloped by the most beautiful cedar I had ever seen. It arced out of our neighbor's yard at a Tower-of-Pisa angle, shrouding us in its bowed, fleecy, hovering limbs. What shelter! You could have breakfast there during a thunderstorm. What privacy! On stifling summer nights, you could read in your underpants. The sidewalk was only ten feet away, but our deck was as isolated as any Cordoban courtyard. It was like something out of Romantic poetry, a bower of bliss, an elfin grot.


Darren Gygi

The tree also shaded us from Rod, who lived in the house next door. Rod had the weird, over-fastidious, too-much-time-on-his-hands air of certain single men. "Manicured" doesn't do justice to the state his lawn was in. Saturdays and Sundays, he'd be out working on it with what I'd swear was a vacuum cleaner. *Gzheemp! Gzheemp! Gzhoo!* His bushes were so squared off I assume he trimmed them with a toenail clipper.

I came home from work one night, and my wife said, "You're going to be mad." I walked onto my deck and my tread echoed off eight row houses now plainly visible across the street. It was an elfin grot no longer. No—it was like Mussolini's balcony over the Piazza Venezia, naked to the world. The neighbor across the street, a retired forester, was standing, hands on hips, glaring at Rod. I looked over into Rod's yard and there he was, standing next to a stump. (Very neatly sawed off, of course; it wouldn't surprise me if he'd sanded it.) He looked up at me with a wimpy little smile, and said, nodding cheerily, "Oh, I cut down . . . that tree. It was dropping needles on the lawn."

I usually reject out of hand ordinances against cutting down trees. But a few weeks later Rod did something that changed my mind: *He decided to move.* That puts it in a different light, doesn't it? He demolished a living thing that had delighted a streetful of families for three generations and would have delighted it for three generations more—in order to render more pleasurable his two or three remaining lawn-vacuuming sessions.

Now there's a realtor's sign out front that says "F★NCY INTERIOR!" ("T★CKY!" is the more usual verdict of the curious neighbors who've seen the bronze golf dogs and clay figurines inside.) Rod's house is half the size of ours and he's asking twice what we paid. For a while I wished him nothing but ill. During open houses, I wanted to appear on my all-too-exposed deck with cigars and whiskey bottles, fire questions at my wife like *¡Ay, guapita! ¿Cuándo llega el próximo embarque de cocaína?*, and keep a tinny transistor radio half-tuned at full blast to the rap station.

On the other hand, if the jerk gets what he's asking, my house will certainly be worth enough that I'll be able to afford to replace the tree.

CHRISTOPHER CALDWELL

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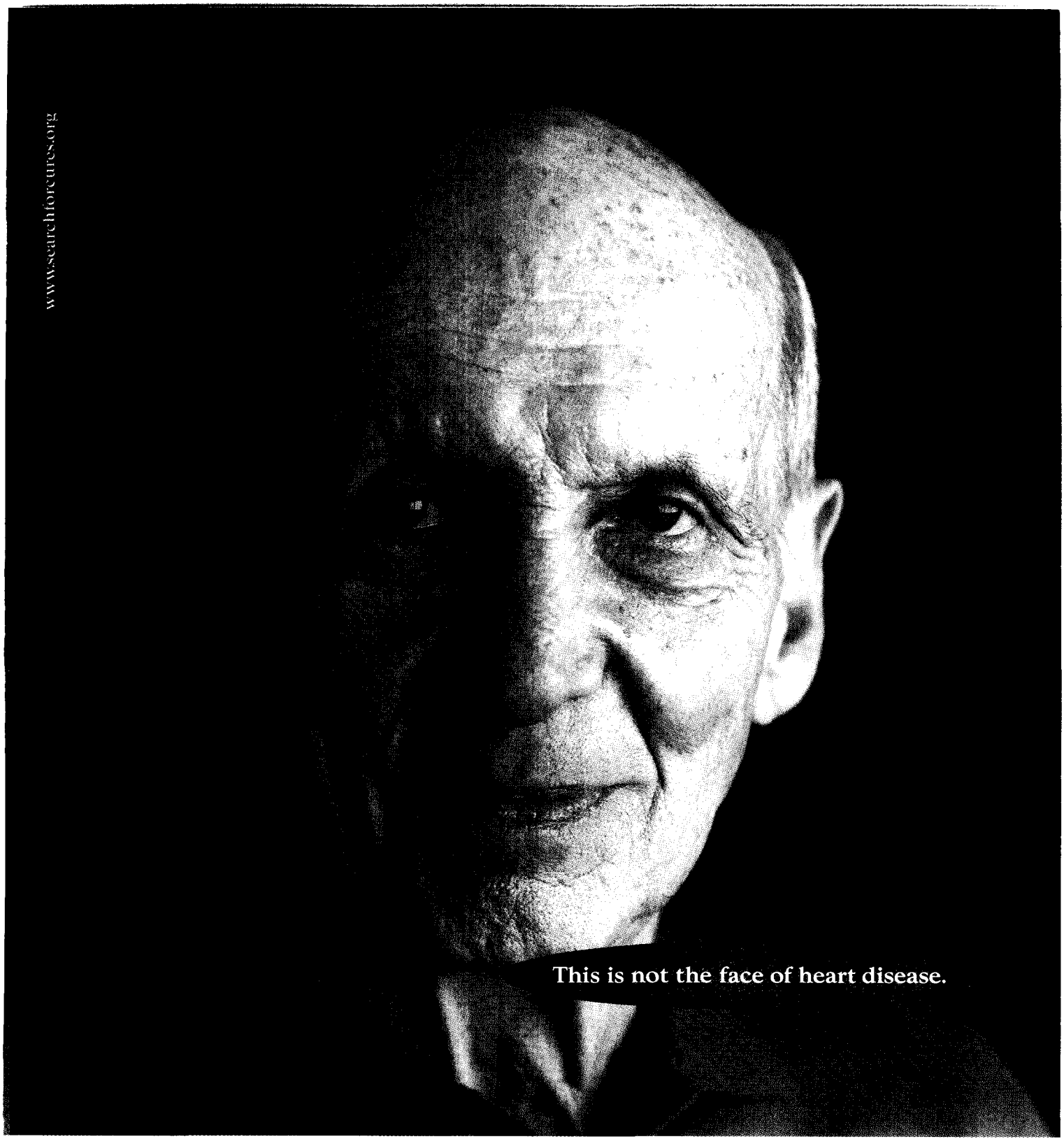

It's the face of Charles Dubin—choir singer, moviegoer and retired TV director. Four years ago, Charles had "a funny feeling in his chest." When Charles heard the words "heart disease" from his doctor, he feared losing his independence and his ability to enjoy life fully. But, thanks to effective medicines, today he's enjoying an active retirement. And, with his new healthier lifestyle, Charles is also doing his part to keep his heart in shape. Heart disease is the leading cause of death among Americans. But in the last 30 years, modern medicines have helped reduce the number of deaths by half. New medicines are also helping to keep more patients out of the hospital by controlling high-risk conditions that lead to heart disease, such as high blood pressure and high cholesterol. Pharmaceutical company researchers are working hard to discover breakthroughs that will help make many illnesses and diseases a thing of the past and bring more patients new hope for a better tomorrow. So, more people like Charles can get on with living and go on with the show.

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Elián and Us

I want to thank Tucker Carlson and Christopher Caldwell for their excellent articles on the issues surrounding the Elián González controversy ("Miami Virtue," "Elián Should Stay," April 10).

I am a Cuban-American, born in Miami. Both of my parents fled Cuba as teenagers. As a college student in Tulsa, Oklahoma, I am shocked and appalled to see the number of Americans who clearly do not understand the situation from which Elián has fled. Many are shocked when I explain that Cuba's government is one of totalitarian communism, or that Fidel Castro's regime indoctrinates children into military Marxism at an early age against the will of their parents. I hope that Caldwell's explanation of this childhood indoctrination, and of the fallacies behind the supposed "parental rights" of Elián's father, opens the eyes of many Americans. This innocent boy's right to stay in the United States must be defended.

Virgilio Beato
Tulsa, OK

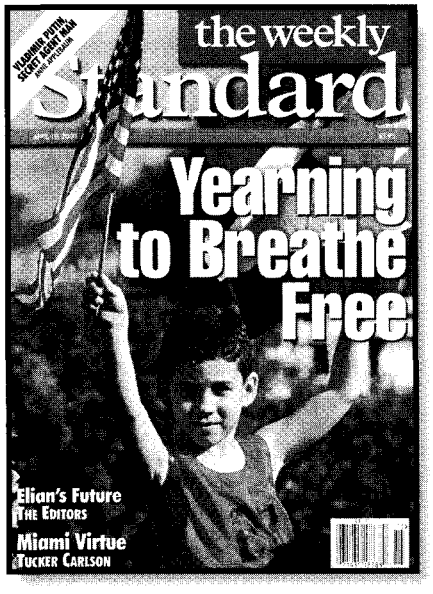
Christopher Caldwell's editorial about Elián González neglects the principle of parental care for one's offspring. Whether the boy would be "better off" in Miami than in Cuba has no bearing on the case. There are millions of waifs throughout the world who would be far better off in the United States than in their present poverty. Now, because of all the hoopla, the poor kid is doomed to become a political football no matter where he resides.

I wonder what the feeling would be if his father had taken him to the United States, rather than his mother and her boyfriend. Would he be returned to his mother?

William Kielhorn
Naples, FL

I wish to applaud The Weekly Standard's support of Elián González's right to freedom. Because this is an imperfect world, a conflict exists between this child's human rights and the value of family. Ideally he should have both his father and his human rights. However, it appears that Elián will have one or the other. In this heart-rending conflict, I support his human rights, the right to freedom, over the value of family.

I cannot understand how some individuals on both the left and the right, after decades of calling our attention to the suppression of human rights throughout the world and the need to support every human's entitlement to those rights, should now be telling us that such rights are not as important as family. Are we now to believe that if someone who is legally qualified to vote in America is denied this right, then it is okay, if they at least have their family? Is



it okay for law enforcement agencies to engage in racial profiling so long as the victims still have their families? Of course not; because freedom trumps everything.

Besides turning their commitment to human rights on its head, these individuals seem willing to revive an old primitive custom of human/child sacrifice to appease forces greater than themselves. To placate the great forces of "International Relations," Elián González is being offered up.

Of far greater impact than these words could have, would be a front cover of your magazine illustrating Janet Reno placing a bound Elián upon an altar before an idol of Fidel Castro, with Bill Clinton content and lip-biting in the background. It would be tasteless. But returning Elián to the current police-state of Cuba is far worse.

Kenneth Barker
Yuma, AZ

Vanishing Virtue

In his light-hearted criticism of Harvard University's Vanishing Voter Project, Andrew Ferguson is wrong to make the rather serious claim that low rates of voter turnout are consistent with a healthy democracy ("Vanishing Voters, Vamoose!" April 10). They are not. And one does not need to be a part of the punditocracy, or some vast, left-wing, academic-led conspiracy, to see why.

Indeed, it was in the pages of this magazine that David Brooks presaged Ferguson's words: "Conservatives have not worried much about the decline of citizenship over the last few decades . . . many conservatives have even looked benignly on the decline in voting rates" ("One Nation Conservatism," Sept. 13, 1999). Citing Tocqueville, Brooks went on to argue that conservatives ought to be concerned if Americans are withdrawing from civic life: "Active citizenship . . . inculcates certain virtues that are necessary to any great democratic nation." Brooks is right and Ferguson is wrong.

If Ferguson feels that this appeal to virtue is too soft- or pointy-headed, then he might consider another reason why conservatives should care about whether Americans care about politics. Conservatives have long complained that the policy agenda in Washington is dictated by unrepresentative elites. Washington abhors a vacuum; when rank and file voters are silent, elites are happy to whisper in politicians' ears. A truly representative democracy requires that voters make their voices heard. And that can happen only when those voters haven't vanished.

Virtue and voice—two reasons why conservatives should applaud, and not ridicule, efforts to pull America out of its civic tailspin. Even when they come out of Harvard.

David E. Campbell
Somerville, MA

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the weekly Standard

Lázaro González, American Hero

Last week, attorney general Janet Reno demanded that Lázaro González deliver his great-nephew Elián to Elián's father Juan Miguel, now holed up in the diplomatic residence of the Cuban mission outside Washington. Lázaro did not knuckle under. Had he done so, the boy would now be in Cuba, the plaything of a totalitarian regime. While the administration had expressed its "wish" that both father and son remain in the United States until court appeals are exhausted, Reno's deputy Eric Holder had stressed that no one could have forced Juan Miguel to stay. We know perfectly well what would have happened if Elián had been delivered to the Cuban authorities who surround his father.

Of course, everyone seems to think it natural that Juan Miguel González hasn't gone to Miami to see his son. He's been too busy, meeting with pro-Castro groups, from the Alliance for a Responsible Cuba Policy to TransAfrica, and chatting with the likes of Charles Rangel, Steve Largent, and Maxine Waters. This last has a truly vile record of cosseting Castro, one that extends to a 1998 letter asking the Maximum Leader to continue to offer "political asylum" to former Black Panther Joanne Chesimard, who fled to Cuba after being charged with—and later convicted of—murdering a police officer in 1973.

So is Juan Miguel here as a father or as a lobbyist for Castro? We pass no judgment either on his character or on his fitness as a father. But we insist that, with his mother having been moved to a Cuban government house—presumably not for a vacation—and with his wife's child from a previous marriage left behind on the island, we cannot know the pressures under which he is laboring. We would like to be sure that he actually has his son's best interests at heart. After all, many a father in such circumstances has forgone the joy of bringing up his son to allow him to live with loving relatives in a free country.

Meanwhile, President Clinton told the American Society of Newspaper Editors last week: "I did everything I could to stay out of it to avoid politicizing it." Baloney. INS commissioner Doris Meissner's January 5 order that Elián be sent back to his father in Cuba is just that—a discretionary order from an executive branch official who reports, through Janet Reno, to the president. The administration has spent weeks pontificating about the "rule of law," while behaving as if it *is* the law.

Well, now the administration has been given a law to obey. The 11th Circuit in Atlanta issued a stay last week barring Elián from being sent out of the country until Lázaro's appeal comes up on May 8. The administration immediately petitioned the 11th Circuit to order Elián handed over to his father.

Lázaro, for his part, petitioned the U.S. District Court to bar the deportation of Elián until it can be proved that Cuba is "no longer engaged in 'systematic, gross violations of human rights.'" The administration said in response that "once Juan González has custody of Elián, the decision as to when, if ever, Elián leaves the United States will be his to make." This is the position of an administration that wants to collude with Cuba—in contravention of the law, if necessary—in hustling a little boy out of the country.

Most disheartening is to see American government officials parroting the Cuban campaign of calumny launched against the Miami Gonzálezes. In the 11th Circuit case, Justice Department spokesperson Carole Florman accused Lázaro González of being a lawbreaker who comes before the court with "unclean hands."

Unclean? Let us be clear about what Lázaro González did and did not do. He was not stoking violence or "daring the government to take [Elián] by force," as one wire report had it. Rather, as Lázaro's lawyer Spencer Eig explains: "If the INS wants to deport [the boy] they will have to do it themselves. They are free to come to the house. [Lázaro] will unlock his doors and he will not resist and he will stand by tearfully." Mr. González is a law-abiding man. But living in America, not Cuba, he is not required to assist Fidel Castro in depriving individuals of their rights. That task is reserved for Bill Clinton and Janet Reno.

—Christopher Caldwell, for the Editors.

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the weekly Standard

China's Trade Deal—Why Rush?

At least we know why Bill Clinton and Al Gore are desperate for a quick vote on granting permanent normal trade status to China. Last week, big labor came to town to protest the pending deal with China. The labor movement held an impressive rally of over 10,000 people on Capitol Hill, and then sent thousands of constituents into the offices of House and Senate members to make their case. Members of Congress are hearing even more of this back home in their districts over spring break, and they will get still more heat when they return to Washington. In short, the weeks leading up to the trade status vote, now scheduled for the week of May 22, will be hell.

Hell for Democrats, that is. The vote is a potential disaster for the Democratic party. The most vocal and powerful forces lining up against the China deal happen to be the Democrats' most important special interest groups, the ones the party counts on to deliver money and volunteers in tight races across the country. Fear of big labor, and also fear of environmental and human rights groups, is what makes it difficult for the Clinton administration to muster even 80 Democratic votes for China's normalized trade status. But then there's the problem of big business, especially the high-tech industry. The Democrats want their money, too, and big business is also making the China trade vote a litmus test. So the party is torn between two constituencies that refuse to be mollified.

Meanwhile, Al Gore is running for president, and he's feeling the heat. He's at odds with labor over the China trade deal, but he still has the endorsement of the AFL-CIO and most other unions. This is an unstable situation. Both Gore and labor leaders have to worry whether some of their rank and file will spurn Gore and find someone willing to stand up for them on trade. Jimmy Hoffa and Pat Buchanan were nuzzling each other at the Teamsters rally on Capitol Hill last week. Labor may not be inclined to forgive and forget those who gave them the shaft. Even if the people giving them the shaft are Democrats.

So what's a poor Democratic party to do? Get this vote over with as quickly as possible. Do you want to know Al Gore's worst nightmare? Picture the scene: It's a hot August night in Los Angeles. The Democratic national convention has begun. But Congress has not yet voted on normal trade relations with China. So outside the convention hall are tens of thousands of protesters—protesters wearing hard-hats, protesters wearing funny animal costumes, protesters with heavily pierced protuberances, protesters taunting the famously cool-headed L.A. police. Democratic and liberal protesters. It makes last year's riot in Seattle look like a picnic. And throughout the entire convention, it's the main thing the news media choose to cover. It's a frightening image, unless you're a Republican.

So it's not hard to understand why Bill Clinton and Al Gore are desperate for a trade status vote as soon as possible. The harder question is this: Why are Republicans?

We've spent the last few months outlining the principled and strategic reasons that make passing permanent normal trade relations for China now a bad idea. There's the Chinese government's increasingly brutal repression of political and religious groups, all documented by the Clinton administration's own State Department. There is the fact that China remains, according to the CIA, the world's leading proliferator of nuclear weapons and missile technologies and hardware. And there are China's threats to make war on democratic Taiwan if the new Taiwanese government refuses to accept Beijing's terms for reunification. Finally, there is no need for a quick vote on permanent trade status for China, which cannot even become a full-fledged member of the World Trade Organization until the end of this year, at the earliest. The Chinese first have to reach a deal with the Europeans, and then with the WTO itself. American businesses will pay no penalty if a vote is delayed until later this year, or even next.

But let's set all these matters of principle and strategic interest aside for one moment and talk politics (note to high-minded, non-partisan readers: Stop reading here).

Republicans certainly shouldn't be ashamed to be thinking in political terms about this vote. After all, politics is the only thing on the minds of Al Gore and the Democrats. From a Republican perspective, there are no advantages to an early vote on permanent normal trade relations. No one is going to be protesting at the Republican convention at the end of July. (Try to picture high-tech CEOs marching in funny costumes outside the convention hall in Philadelphia.) Nor should Republican leaders who are lusting after high-tech industry contributions worry that they will be punished for holding a later vote. The longer this thing drags out, the more Republican big business pals will see what a big problem they have with a Democratic party so sharply divided between its pro-labor and pro-business constituencies. And, excuse us, but at the end of the day, wouldn't it be good for the country to throw a monkey-wrench into the Democratic campaign and increase the chances for a Republican presidential victory in November?

Let Republicans be the smart party this time. Labor leaders are only asking their Democratic allies to vote against *permanent* normal trade relations, and allowing them to vote for the usual annual renewal of normal trade status. Republicans can do the same. But they would be smart to do it later rather than sooner. September sounds nice.

—William Kristol and Robert Kagan, for the Editors

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On the Miami Barricades

The Little Havana community stands firm, while Janet Reno backpedals. BY TUCKER CARLSON

Miami

IT'S AROUND LUNCH TIME when someone in the crowd of protesters outside Elián González's house thrusts a Fidel-on-a-stick into the air. It is a fatigue-clad dummy with a Castro mask taped to its head. The dummy is wearing a stuffed woman's bra and has a frayed cigar in its mouth. It floats above the crowd for an instant. Suddenly a man reaches up and grabs at the dummy. He is intent on hurting it. Within seconds he has ripped the Castro mask off and shredded the bra. The dummy comes down. Even in effigy, Fidel doesn't play well in this crowd.

It is Thursday, April 13, the day Janet Reno has selected to end the long Elián González saga. The attorney general has given Elián's Miami relatives until 2:00 P.M. to deliver the boy to an airport outside Miami. If the family doesn't comply, federal marshals are prepared to remove him by force. The crowd is here to prevent that from happening.

AP/Wide World Photos

Thousands of people have shown up. Police cruisers and fire trucks have blocked off streets around the González house for blocks in every direction. There is no traffic, but lots of activity. In the press encampment, Cuban-born actor Andy Garcia is giving a television interview, trying to choke back tears as he explains why the feds should not take Elián from Miami. Across the street, singer Gloria Estefan is standing at a microphone, urging the crowd to remain calm but vigilant. (Estefan's father, a onetime bodyguard to Fulgencio Batista, was captured during the Bay of Pigs invasion and imprisoned by Castro.) On the other side of the barricades, an elderly woman is passing out flyers with a picture of Bill Clinton and Al Gore locked in a homosexual embrace. The air is filled with cigar smoke. A radio is blasting Little Havana's newest top ten hit, a salsa tune about Elián. The neighborhood feels like the scene of a carnival, though one with an unusually large number of television cameras.

The day's truly surreal events, however, seem to be unfolding in Washington. Attorney Greg Craig, whose last client of note was Bill Clinton, has convened a press conference to lecture America on the importance of the rule of law. Unnamed "officials" at the Justice Department are warning that Elián's staged videotaped statement, released this morning by his Miami relatives, is a personal offense to them, and will only harden their resolve to return the boy to Cuba. Elián's father, meanwhile, is caught on camera flipping the bird to protesters outside the Cuban Interests Section. Miami television stations replay the Juan Miguel tape again and again; the local ABC affiliate describes his extended middle finger as "an international gesture that needs no explaining."

Back in Little Havana, the crowd is growing larger. Yet it remains almost entirely Cuban. This makes sense. In Miami, reaction to the Elián story breaks down neatly along ethnic lines. The vast majority of Cubans in the city think Elián should stay. The vast majority of everyone else thinks he should go. Polls show that more than 90 percent of blacks in Miami believe the boy should be sent back to Cuba right away, by FedEx if necessary. It's hard to read this as anything but a reflection of larger ethnic tensions in the area. The theme of the day on local English-language talk radio seems to be, "Why have we let Those People turn our city into a banana republic?" Virtually every caller sounds angry and confused.

Tucker Carlson is a staff writer at THE WEEKLY STANDARD.

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Miami's Cuban population is of course angry and confused, too. Some of the policemen sent to Elián's house to maintain order have trouble concealing their feelings about the case. "My grandparents came from Cuba," explains Angel Calzadilla, a uniformed Miami cop who is milling about the press area. "They instilled in me from when I was little that communism is evil. To see this child returned to that is heartbreaking." Calzadilla doesn't say so, but it is clear that he doesn't plan to lift a finger to help Janet Reno. How many federal marshals would it take to get Elián out of his uncle's house? a reporter asks. Calzadilla smiles. "I think 'shitload' is the official term," he says.

Around noon, the crisis ends. Janet Reno gives up. The public, she says in a televised statement, "will not see marshals" at Elián's house. "If we are compelled to enforce our order," the attorney general explains, "we intend to do so in a reasonable, measured way." In other words, We won't dare try to make good on our threats to go in and get the boy.

Reno ends her statement with more talk about the law and her willingness to enforce it, but as far as the crowd in Little Havana is concerned, it is just air. The attorney general of the United States promised to remove Elián from Miami today. The protests forced her into a humiliating frenzy of backpedaling. It is that simple. A man next to the barricades grabs a megaphone. "Janet Reno called it off because we were here," he shouts. "Because *we were here*."

An hour later, an appeals court in Atlanta issues an emergency stay, which will temporarily prevent Elián from being returned to Cuba. It's not a total victory, but at the moment, it is pretty close. In the front yard of their little house, Elián's relatives are celebrating. Delfin González, one of the great uncles, is waving to the crowd and grinning. A burly cop standing nearby is grinning, too. A hundred cameras are watching, but the cop can't contain himself. He throws his arms around Delfin González and gives the uncle a bear hug. ♦

Have Gun, Will Vote

It turns out that guns are more popular than gun control. BY FRED BARNES

WILLIAM SCHNEIDER couldn't believe his eyes. The CNN commentator and fellow at the American Enterprise Institute felt there must be something wrong with a recent CNN poll. It showed Americans are evenly divided on whether George W. Bush, who doesn't talk much about guns, or Al Gore, who has made gun control a theme of his presidential campaign, handles the "gun issue" better. Schneider requested the question be asked again. It was—with the same result. Meanwhile, another poll asked if Bush or Gore would do "a better job of handling gun control." Schneider, a polling expert, thought this question invited people to say Gore. Nonetheless, Bush won by a half-dozen percentage points.

The gun issue isn't supposed to be playing this way in 2000. Democrats, liberals, the press, most of the Washington political community, and even a good number of Republicans thought the politics of the issue had been transformed, post-Columbine. Indeed, the massacre at the Colorado high school a year ago did prompt a rise in public support for more gun control. And the Senate responded within weeks by passing a stringent new law restricting gun sales and production. When the House balked, it seemed a major issue had been created. No longer would the intensity be on the side of the National Rifle Association and gun owners. Now, it would be with middle-class voters, suburbanites, soccer moms, and others who favor sweeping gun control, including registration of all handguns. They would force queasy Republicans to swallow gun control or else lose in this fall's election.

Quite the opposite has happened. The intensity has shifted—strengthening the foes of gun control. NRA membership is soaring and may reach 4 million by year's end. Most Republicans feel politically secure on the gun issue, and President Clinton has jettisoned the not-so-popular phrase "gun control" in favor of "gun safety." Democrats made gun control the overriding issue last fall in the Virginia and New Jersey legislative races. The result was GOP capture of both houses of the Virginia legislature for the first time ever and easy Republican retention of the New Jersey statehouse. In poll after poll, public support for gun control has dipped. More important, public belief that more gun restrictions are the answer to gun violence, especially among youths, has faded. "What has always been true of the gun issue is still true," says Schneider. "The issue has far more salience for gun owners than for gun control advocates. Gun owners are always ready to vote this issue. Gun controllers rarely vote the issue."

A new twist to the debate has been crucial in undermining the drive for gun control. This is the argument, stridently voiced by NRA executive vice president Wayne LaPierre, that existing gun laws should be enforced before any new ones are enacted. "Finally, their side has an argument the public is receptive to," says Karlyn Bowman, who monitors polls for AEI. NRA officials are apologetic about the crude way LaPierre made his point on national TV. He accused

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the Clinton administration of not enforcing gun laws to insure a certain level of gun violence in the country, thus spurring support for gun control. But LaPierre's tactic worked. "It caused people to pay attention to what he is saying," says Bowman. "They listened to his argument."

Polls bear this out. A survey in April by ABC News/*Washington Post* asked whether "passing stricter gun control laws" or "stricter enforcement of existing laws" is the best way to curb gun violence. Enforcement was preferred by 53 percent to 33 percent. In a survey for YRock, the Young Republican website, GOP pollster Frank Luntz asked for reaction to this statement: "Passing gun laws is what keeps politicians' careers alive. Enforcing gun laws is what keeps the rest of us alive." Sixty percent agreed, 34 percent didn't. Another Luntz question asked what would be more successful in reducing crimes committed with guns. Enforcement of existing laws and tough sentencing beat more gun control with trigger locks and gun show restrictions by better than 2-to-1.

Republicans have not only jumped on enforcement as an alternative to gun control, they've forced Democrats to go along. By championing enforcement, Republicans have deftly adjusted to a change in the gun debate that Democrats were certain would help their side. As recently as two years ago, Republicans figured they could ignore the gun debate entirely. Now, given the level of media obsession with guns, that's risky. The enforcement issue gives Republicans a popular theme. In this regard, they first seized on Project Exile, a program in Richmond, Virginia, in which criminals who use guns are prosecuted in federal court, where trials are swifter and sentences harsher. The Clinton administration privately opposed expansion of Project Exile until last year when a Senate hearing on it was scheduled. The Saturday before, the president reversed the policy and used his radio address to praise the program.

In the House, Republicans believe they have, as one aide put it, "totally shifted the debate to enforcement and other issues." Just this month, they pushed through a bill that offers grants to help states work with federal prosecutors and impose mandatory jail sentences on criminals who use or carry guns during a crime. These sentences would be added to the prison term for the crime itself. Democratic leaders opposed the measure, but it passed 358 to 60. The *New York Times*

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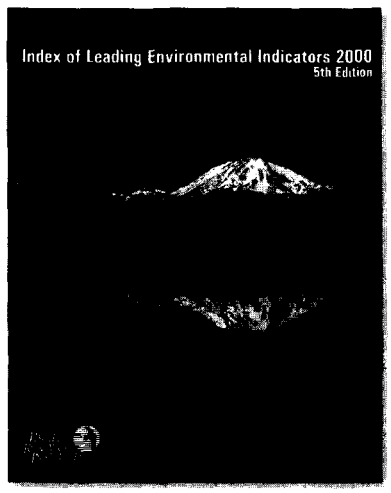

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reported the next day that Republicans were "conceding vulnerability on a hot campaign issue." Actually, Republicans were exploiting an advantage.

To see how safe Republicans really feel on the gun issue, I met recently with what amounted to a focus group of a half-dozen House members. They included one from a suburban district in the Northeast, one from a Midwestern city, another from the Midwest suburbs. All but one represent swing districts. When confronted with the theory that the politics of the issue now favors the gun controllers, they all disagreed strongly. On separate gun legislation now before a deadlocked House-Senate conference, they feel they've satisfied both sides. They're for background checks on purchasers at gun shows, pleasing soccer moms, but only for checks that have NRA approval.

What if this gun legislation—not the enforcement bill—remains bottled up? No problem. The public has dramatically lost faith in gun control as a solution to violence in America, notably to gun violence in schools. What would have the greatest impact in reducing school violence? Only 10 percent said gun control in the Luntz poll, while 77 percent said teaching about right and wrong. Given other choices, 84 percent said parental involvement was the answer, while 14 percent answered gun control.

One person who hasn't been surprised by voters' attitudes about guns is Karl Rove, George W. Bush's chief strategist. Bush, of course, echoes the Republican line about first enforcing, and then tinkering with, existing gun laws. Rove characterizes the presidential race as between "one guy who says the answer is more gun control" and "the other guy who says we've got laws on the books people are breaking . . . and while we need a few improvements, we need to send a message that when you use a gun, you go to jail." The second guy wins 60 percent to 20 percent, according to Rove. He exaggerates, but he and Bush understand that the new politics of gun control are a lot like the old. ♦

Al Gore in the Balance

They're reissuing the vice president's book, and that's good news for Bush. BY IRWIN M. STELZER

EARTH DAY IS UPON US, and by way of celebration the publisher of Al Gore's 1992 self-styled "personal journey . . . in search of a true understanding of the global ecological crisis" has decided to reissue an unchanged version of the book. This decision should make George W. Bush a lot happier than it does the vice president. For if ever there was an intemperate statement of what environmentalists seek—or at least that faction of the movement with no sense of the economic and human costs of some of the greener proposals—*Earth in the Balance* is it.

Gore tells us that his understanding of environmental issues started "on our family farm," and that he still remembers "how important it is to stop up the smallest gully 'before it gets started good.'" This early understanding of the need to preserve the environment was buttressed when his mother introduced him to Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*, with its warning of the dire consequence of the use of pesticides, and when he learned that Agent Orange "was the suspected cause of chromosomal damage"—the combined effect being to make the vice president "wary of all chemicals that have extraordinarily powerful effects on the world around us." One of the effects of Agent Orange, noted but not integrated by Gore into any attempt to appraise its overall usefulness in Vietnam, was that "the people who wanted to shoot at us had fewer places to hide." Sounds like a significant benefit to tally against a "suspected" cost.

All of this led Gore to run for president in 1987 "to elevate the importance of the crisis as a political issue." Of course, when pollsters told him that the environment was not high on voters' list of concerns, "I came to downplay it in my standard stump speech." Cynical opportunism? Certainly not: "I continued to emphasize it heavily in my meetings with editorial boards." Besides—shades of his current boss—Gore felt deep remorse over his own weakness: "I simply lacked the strength to keep talking about the environmental crisis constantly whether it was being reported in the press or not." Summary: My campaign was guided by the polls, which led me to stop discussing publicly the issue about which I felt so deeply that it prompted me to seek the world's most powerful office. And I'm sorry that I was so weak.

But Gore soon turned over a new leaf. By 1993, as he wrote in an introduction to the paperback edition of *Earth in the Balance*, he had become—get this—"impatient with my own tendency to put a finger to the political winds and proceed cautiously." This from the man who takes polls to decide what color suits to wear and hires consultants to tell him how to behave like an alpha-male.

When it comes to describing the state of the nation's environment, however, Gore certainly is true to his aim of avoiding caution. Apocalypse now—right now—is how he sees it. "Our system is on the verge of losing its essential equilibrium"; we face "a catastrophe in the making" and "unprecedented social and political upheavals" as a result of climate

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change; the demise of the spotted owl "would mark the loss of an entire ecosystem"; a waste disposal crisis is looming that "stems from our lost sense of place within the natural world."

As population increases explosively and "urbanization continue[s] to disrupt traditional cultural patterns," "hundreds of millions of people may well become ever more susceptible to the spread of diseases when populations of pests, germs, and viruses migrate with the changing climate patterns." There is more, but you get the point: We are headed for a hot place in a handbasket.

Note the "may well" in the last quoted sentence. It seems to suggest that we really can't be certain about at least some aspects of the crisis. Never mind. "It is all too easy to . . . overstudy the problem," Gore assures us. And "research in lieu of action is unconscionable." Never mind that scientists are less certain than Gore. David E. Parker of the Hadley Centre of Britain's Meteorological Office, for instance, expressed the views of many of his colleagues in a recent issue of *Science* when he wrote, "The consensus is that major advances are needed in our modeling and interpretation of temperature profiles, along with considerable improvements in data acquisition [and] documentation . . . and their analysis by the scientific community worldwide." To the "impatient" Gore, apocalypse now requires action now.

Alas for Al Gore's sense of apocalypse, sufficient time has elapsed since he wrote *Earth in the Balance* for two things to happen. First, evidence has accumulated that calls into question whether the earth is indeed warming, and, if it is, whether that is necessarily a bad thing. Second, we can now look at some of Gore's predictions to see just how little sense it would have made in 1992, and would make now, to spend huge sums avoiding the collapse he expects in the world's ecosystem.

Start with the temperature data. Some readings show a slight rise in the earth's surface temperature in recent decades. But these observed temperature changes on land are not to be seen in the readings accumulated from satellites, suggesting that the land-based readings might be misleading. And scientists such as Arthur Robinson and Noah Robinson of the Oregon Institute of Science and Medicine have had time to study very long-run data, an analysis that reveals that earth temperatures are now near their 3,000-year average (readings based on isotopic ratios in the skeletons of marine organisms) "and clearly are not unusual."

Worse still for the Gore hypothesis, physical and social scientists have begun to point out that warming would bring benefits as well as costs. The Robinsons point out that increased use of carbon-based fuels has accelerated the growth of forests and animals. Others note that even the most extreme predictions of warming foresee temperature increases of a lesser magnitude than Americans have voluntarily sought by heading for the Sun Belt, Florida, and southern California. Not many folks have chosen to give up Florida for Massachusetts or North Dakota.

Gore's second major problem is a version of that which Irving Kristol long ago pointed out is faced by all liberals: He has been mugged by reality. Our failure to develop environmentally efficient products, says Gore circa 1992, dooms us to trail Japan in economic growth. Well, Japan entered a deep and prolonged recession shortly after that was written, while the American economy has grown at rates that were deemed unattainable only a few years ago.

Then there is the issue of California's drought, the sharp drop in snowfall, and a snowpack that was at the time of Gore's writing "15 percent of the normal volume," all occurring as "global temperatures have reached

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record high levels." The consequences of that drought, Gore then noted, "are already staggering and may get worse." They didn't. Snowpack, precipitation, and reservoir storage data from the California Department of Water Resources show that in most years since 1992 the snowpack and precipitation conditions have far exceeded the 50-year average that is used as a yardstick, and reservoir storage has been above the historic average since 1995.

One can't fault Gore merely for getting some things wrong. What he can legitimately be faulted for is using highly uncertain predictions of warming and its consequences to buttress a case for excessively intrusive government regulation of the way we live, drive, and work. One wonders which came first: the desire to order other people's lives, or the desire to preserve the environment. After all, this is a man who thinks suburbanites can't be trusted to decide for themselves whether to have sidewalks in their communities, and that Americans can't be trusted to invest their own retirement funds. Those are jobs for super-government.

This much is clear: Gore has never met an environmental issue that didn't strike him as an urgent reason for bigger government. During the European subsistence crisis of 1816-17, Gore notes with what to this reader seems some satisfaction, "the bureaucratic, administrative tendencies of the modern state were given great impetus." And the disruptive effects of our Dust Bowl in the 1930s led to "an even more complex version of the administrative state, Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal." These developments Gore labels "human adaptation to climate change."

That the vice president, given the opportunity to do so, would further expand the reach of the state there can be little doubt. He thinks that "we are doing virtually nothing" to address the issue of global warming, and that "we are unwilling to look beyond ourselves to see the effect of our action today on our children and grandchildren." An odd and ungrateful charge to level against a generation that has spent billions to clean up the environment, that has improved the quality of our rivers and our air, and that has required new industrial installations to incorporate equipment that will surely make the lives of the coming generation better than our own—all at our own, unselfish cost.

Still, Gore wants more—more spending, more taxing, more regulating. In the case of the Kyoto protocol, the international agreement ostensibly aimed at reducing the emission of greenhouse gases, the fact that the Senate is almost unanimously opposed to its ratification is unlikely to stop Gore from anyhow complying with its terms. He will accomplish by administrative fiat what he cannot accomplish using constitutionally mandated treaty-ratification procedures. After all, his handpicked head of the Environmental Protection Agency is well known for pushing regulation by fiat so far beyond what the law allows that the courts have pulled her up short—something courts dominated by Gore appointees would be highly unlikely to do.

The good news is that Americans have, by and large, so far gotten what they paid for in terms of environmental enhancement. According to the nonpartisan and highly respected think tank Resources for the Future, the costs and benefits of the various bits of environmental legislation so far adopted are about in balance. The name of the game in the future will be to avoid spending great sums on trivial and inconsequential environmental improvements, but to make only those expenditures that can be justified by their probable benefits. That, alas, is not what the vice president—on the evidence of his book, an environmental absolutist—has in mind. On the other hand, as in 1988, he has barely mentioned the environmental apocalypse in his stump speeches this year. Maybe, just maybe, he is still a cynical opportunist with a finger to the political winds. Let's hope so. ♦

Earl Keleny

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Plus Ça Change . . .

Our bullying, biased, and unreliable peacekeeping partner in Kosovo. BY STEPHEN SCHWARTZ

Mitrovica, Kosovo

CONTROVERSY OVER the role of French peacekeepers in Kosovo has taken a dramatic turn. For weeks, Paris issued angry denials that pro-Serb prejudice had infected its military. But at the end of March, a top French police commander who had been called home from Kosovo was briefly imprisoned for allegedly leaking documents which reveal just that: a French bias in favor of the Serbs and against the international administrator in Kosovo, Bernard Kouchner.

That Kouchner himself is French adds spice to the story. But the most shocking part of the tale is the strong evidence of serious human rights violations by French members of KFOR, the NATO force operating in Kosovo under U.N. mandate, in dealing with Kosovar Albanians.

The scandal originated in the divided northern Kosovo city of Mitrovica, in the French area of occupation. The town has been split between Serbs occupying the neighborhoods north of the river Ibar and Albanians on the south bank.

In February, Mitrovica, which had been seething with resentment and minor violence since the end of the NATO intervention a year ago, erupted. Bombings, of a bus carrying Serbs and a Serb café, led to an assault on Albanian dwellings by thousands of Serbs.

The carnage was disturbing enough, but then came the accusations. French soldiers in Mitrovica were charged with refusing to help American and other police rescue Albanian victims. Later, it was claimed the French had destroyed evidence before one street battle could be investigated by international police.

To other victims of the Balkan wars, none of this was news. The Bosnian Muslims, especially, will never forget what they consider clear French complicity in such incidents as the assassination of a Bosnian Muslim leader, Hakija Turajlic, by a Serb officer while Turajlic was supposedly under French protection; the refusal to provide air cover to stop the 1995 massacre of thousands of Bosnian Muslims at Srebrenica; and the killing of Bosnian Muslims at the Sarajevo airport while it was under French control.

Also in late March, Bosnians were shaken by publication in the United States of former *New York Times* reporter Chuck Sudetic's *Atlantic Monthly* exposé showing that the French had failed to arrest indicted war criminals, whose whereabouts they knew, in the French zone of Bosnia-Herzegovina.

But the events in Mitrovica have been most damaging to French prestige, especially the Americans' claim that they were left to fend for themselves against a Serb mob, while French troops fled the scene. Soon, French units were removed from duty at the Ibar River bridge and replaced by British troops.

In mid-March, another chapter was opened when Amnesty International issued a report alleging serious human rights abuses by the French in Mitrovica. The report received almost no global media publicity. It described how, on the morning of February 13, two French soldiers were hit by gunfire, one in the stomach and one in the arm, in Mitrovica, whereupon French KFOR troops started firing at "snipers." A 37-year-old Albanian, Avni Hajredini, was fatally shot, and 49 Mitrovica Albanians were arrested in their homes.

Almost immediately, representatives of the United Nations administration in Kosovo announced that "a sniper" had been killed. A French KFOR spokesman said Hajredini had been shot by French troops while sniping at them from a balcony; furthermore, Hajredini was "probably" responsible for the wounding of one of the French soldiers. Later statements to the press called him one of two "captured snipers."

Unfortunately, however, Amnesty's investigation found otherwise. A video turned up showing Hajredini only seconds before he was shot, standing on the pavement blocks away from where the French soldiers had been wounded, and not on a balcony. Further, he was not "captured" by French KFOR, as they had claimed, but was taken from the scene by Albanians after he was shot.

On February 17, KFOR retracted the claim that Hajredini had been a sniper and even denied knowing whether Albanians or Serbs had shot at the French soldiers. The next day, KFOR further suggested that Hajredini had not been shot by the French.

By that time Hajredini's body had been released to his family and buried, without an autopsy. As if this performance by KFOR weren't enough, Amnesty had still more evidence against the French. The 49 Albanians arrested on February 13 said they had been verbally threatened by those who arrested them, and then conducted to a filthy, ice-cold KFOR gymnasium where they were kept incommunicado for up to five days. On the first day they were ordered to remain sitting in chairs and forbidden to stand, turn around, or talk. Requests to go to the toilet were met with physical abuse.

After the first night, the KFOR soldiers wore masks, according to Amnesty. Some of the detainees were not allowed to wash for the full five days, and their families were not notified of their whereabouts. Nor were they permitted legal counsel.

One French KFOR official responded to Amnesty's inquiries by saying the prisoners were "no angels—these people shot my sol-

Stephen Schwartz is an American journalist reporting from the Balkans.

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AP/Wide World Photos

French peacekeeprs on patrol in Mitrovica

diers." Other KFOR and U.N. representatives explained the conditions of imprisonment by citing "exceptional circumstances" or a lack of resources, even though the problems in Mitrovica had gone on for almost a year.

The bottom line was that the 49 Albanians had been arrested on the basis of an ethnic criterion alone. Amnesty quoted an international police officer saying that "from a police point of view there was no probable cause" for any of the 49 to be held. The picture that emerged was one of justice worthy of a third world dictatorship, not a leading European power.

The French defense ministry responded to Amnesty's report with silence, while U.N. representatives in Kosovo announced they had "accepted" the report and would look into its findings. The U.N. also promised to appoint an ombudsman to handle such issues. Both Paris and the U.N. in Pristina clearly preferred to let the matter die down, and it did, temporarily. But in Paris at the end of February, the conservative weekly *Le Point* and the radical *Le Canard enchaîné* published secret documents showing that general Louis Le Mière, French commander in Kosovo, had criticized Bernard Kouchner as "anti-Serb."

Matters came to a head in the streets of Paris on the night of March 20, when a French police colonel, Jean-Michel Mechain, 46, challenged a group of men he said had been following him. A fistfight broke out, metropolitan police were called, and it emerged the gang tailing the colonel were agents of DPSD, the national military police. Two of the latter were arrested.

It was soon revealed that Col. Mechain had been ordered home from Kosovo and was under investigation in the publication of the anti-Kouchner memos. On March 27 Mechain appeared before a Paris magistrate on a charge of "leaking confidential defense documents." Facing a possible seven-year prison sentence and a fine of $104,000, he was incarcerated in La Santé prison, known for its bad conditions, but was ordered released after only two days. *Le Monde* on March 30 said the case demonstrated that judges could easily abuse their powers; and it condemned the "questionable habits" for which French military intelligence services have been known in the past.

Mechain is a career officer in the national police, or *gendarmerie*, a body separate from the army, although both report to the ministry of defense. He has had a brilliant record and is in line for promotion to general. But while serving as a legal adviser to Kouchner, he reportedly was sickened by the human rights violations committed by French forces in Kosovo and outraged by the bureaucratic maneuvering employed by Le Mière and others to undermine Kouchner's mission.

On the day Mechain was released, Kouchner testified before the foreign affairs and defense committees of the French National Assembly. He sharply denied being anti-Serb. Earlier, French defense minister Alain Richard had suavely portrayed the "pretended opposition" between the French military and Bernard Kouchner as merely "a normal debate in a situation of crisis." If such discussion is "caricatured as polemic," he said, "that can only mean the democracies don't have enough self-control for the demanding task of reestablishing peace."

Unfortunately, Richard's conclusion is correct. Among those who report to him, only colonel Mechain seems to have a clear understanding of his duty, and he has suffered for it. Without a thorough housecleaning in the French zone of Kosovo, the Western powers, including the United States, have no answer for those Kosovar Albanians—or, for that matter, their Serb neighbors—who claim that U.N. peacekeeping in Kosovo is a fiction. ♦

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—Thomas Sowell

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What If We Had Taken Columbine Seriously?

The political discourse since the killings last year has been foolish, escapist, and cowardly.

By David B. Kopel

Columbine may matter a lot politically, as attested to by the frenzy to exploit the anniversary of that day when two students slaughtered 12 classmates and a teacher, injuring 23 others. Yet the real lesson of Columbine is that very few people care enough about the horrible events of April 20, 1999, to try to prevent their recurrence. Proposals that are manifestly irrelevant—such as more police in the schools, or special restrictions on gun shows—are touted, while proposals that could really make a difference—such as banning all guns, or arming teachers—are shunned. That the year after Columbine has been spent on trivial and irrelevant debates—instead of on serious proposals to save lives—is a sign of the degeneracy of our political culture. Let's consider the favorite palliatives for preventing future Columbines.

At the time of the attack, Columbine High School had a full-time "school resource officer," i.e., a sheriff's deputy. The officer engaged in a brief gunfight with the two murderers, at the start of their rampage near an entrance to the school. Neither the deputy nor the killers scored any hits. The deputy stayed outside the building to care for a wounded student. His brief gunfight probably saved two lives, by distracting one of the killers from a student and teacher he was about to murder. The gunfight also gave other students a few extra seconds in which to flee the building.

Having shot their way past the guard, the killers entered Columbine High School, and began looking for people to kill. Although police officers, sheriff's deputies, and SWAT team members began arriving at the school quickly, none of them entered the building for 20 minutes.

The killers (let's omit their names, to deny them some small measure of the notoriety they craved) had planned to detonate bombs inside the building, and then shoot down the fleeing survivors. The plan was probably derived from the Jonesboro, Arkansas, middle school shooting of March 24, 1998, in which two boys set off a fire alarm and then shot and killed a teacher and four students as they fled.

When the bombs failed to detonate according to plan, the Columbine killers began shooting students face-to-face, most of them in the library, near the building entrance where the murderers had their gunfight with the deputy. Teacher Patti Nielson was in the library along with many students. Nielson immediately called 911 from a library phone. She followed the 911 operator's instructions to keep the students inside the library and wait for the police to arrive. That turned out to be a death sentence for 10 students. The two killers entered the library and began taunting the students, then killing them one by one. Through the open 911 line, the police dispatcher could hear the students being gunned down.

Columbine High School sits on sloping land, so even though the library is on the second story, the library is accessible from the ground. The library door opens to a hallway, and is only 15 steps away from an exit door. While one murder after another was being perpetrated in the library, a dozen police officers were stationed near this exit. These officers made no attempt to enter the building, walk 15 steps, and confront the murderers, who gunned down their classmates with impunity. According to police officers speaking on condition of anonymity, one Denver SWAT officer did begin to enter but was immediately "ordered down" by commanders.

Twenty minutes after the rampage began, three SWAT officers were finally sent into the building—*on the first*

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floor. Finding students rushing out of the building, they decided to escort students out, rather than track down the killers. This was the beginning of a police program to "contain the perimeter." Officers went from classroom to classroom, frisking students, searching closets, and taking students out of the building. These procedures were followed in case there were more than two gunmen in the building, or in case one or more of the killers was trying to blend in with other students.

The perimeter containment program began on the first floor, on the side of the building furthest from where the library killings were in progress.

The two murderers eventually tired of the library killings, and went downstairs to the cafeteria. A surveillance tape in the cafeteria captures their dejection at failing to kill hundreds of people, as they had planned.

Near the cafeteria, more students were hiding in a room, with the door locked. The two murderers attempted to shoot off the lock, and enter that room, so as to kill more victims. Students in the room had called 911 and the line was open, so again the killers' location was known. Many police officers were massed near the cafeteria door. They knew where the murderers were. They knew that the murderers were attempting to get into a room to kill more people. The police stood idle.

The police are not so confident that their tactics were above reproach. Many of the SWAT officers on the scene were horrified that their commanders had forbidden them to assault the killers.

Failing to shoot their way into the room near the cafeteria, the murderers returned to the library upstairs. The students were still there, some dead, some wounded, waiting for the police to come. But instead of resuming their spree, the two murderers killed themselves.

The police, meanwhile, continued "containing the perimeter" one room at a time, working from the end of the building where the killers weren't. It took hours for them to get to the library. In another second-story room, science teacher Dave Sanders bled to death. He might have been saved by faster action—as was every wounded student who received prompt medical attention.

The national media ignored the police inaction. The Colorado media covered almost every aspect of Columbine intensively. For weeks afterward, Columbine was the lead story on local television and in the state's two major papers, the *Denver Post* and the *Rocky Mountain News*. But except for KOA radio hosts Dan Caplis and Mike Rosen, hardly anyone said anything about the deadly over-caution of the police. Partly, there was a commendable reluctance by the media to shift any blame away from the two murderers themselves. And partly, too, there was a widespread feeling that it would be ignoble to question the work of the police in hindsight, given the chaos of that day.

But the police themselves are not so confident that their tactics were above reproach. Many of the SWAT officers on the scene that day were brave men who were horrified that their commanders had forbidden them to assault the killers. The Jefferson County Sheriff's office felt vulnerable enough to second-guessing that it asked members of the infamous Los Angeles Police Department SWAT team to analyze the police response at Columbine. The LAPD officers concluded that the SWAT teams on the Columbine scene had followed standard procedures.

Indeed, they had. "Officer safety" is the mantra of police tactics. About 90 percent of SWAT team call-outs are no-knock break-ins of the homes of suspected drug dealers. There is no earthly reason why a police officer should die just to arrest a drug dealer. Much less frequently, a SWAT team may respond to a hostage situation, such as a bungled bank robbery, in which the robber is holding bank patrons at gunpoint.

Columbine, however, was different. Children were being murdered. Nevertheless, the officer-safety rule prevailed. Very simply, the police commanders decided that protecting officers from a risk to their lives was more important than attempting to stop the murder of student after student after student after student after student after student after student after student after stu-

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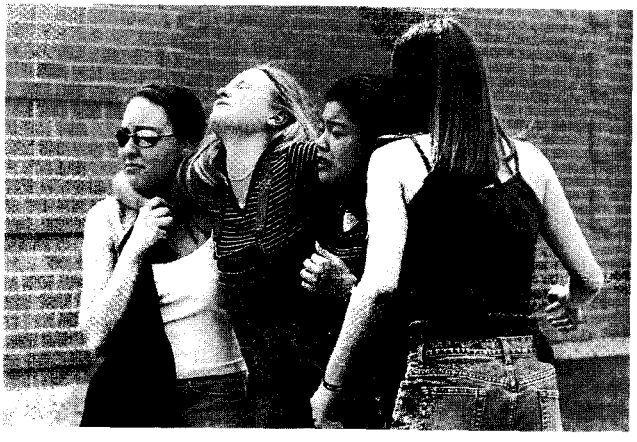
dent. Based on the police inaction when the murderers were attempting to break into the room near the cafeteria, and further inaction when the murderers returned to the library where they had already killed 10 students, it is clear that no matter how many students were going to be killed, not one officer's life would be risked.

If the teacher in the library had led the students out of the building in a mad dash, some would probably have been shot as they ran. Still, many lives would have been saved, since it's much harder to hit a moving target than it is to hit someone at point-blank range who is begging for her life. Instead, the teacher waited, as the 911 operator following proper procedure told her to do. And the students followed their teacher's order. Thus, the killers had their way for 40 minutes—it could have been much longer if they had not then killed themselves—to gun down one person after another. And the police secured the perimeter.

There have been several school shootings in recent years, and not one has been stopped by the police. Whatever the other benefits police provide to society, stopping a school shooting in progress is not one of them. There are plenty of courageous men in police uniform: When will one of them summon the moral seriousness to insist that "procedures" be suspended if, God forbid, another school shooting occurs?



If all guns vanished, crimes like the Columbine massacre would be much less likely to occur. Criminals, though, would be freer in general to go marauding, with greater assurance that their victims would not resist.

"How do I feel? Like banning all guns," wrote Molly Ivins immediately after the Columbine massacre. Of all the gun control proposals discussed after Columbine, this is the only one which plausibly could have stopped the murders.

It is true that murderers can use many different tools to accomplish their objective. The largest school murder in American history, perpetrated by a Michigan school board member in 1927, used explosives. But the weapon of choice in modern school killings has been a gun. The Columbine killers had planted propane bombs all over the school. None of these killed anyone, although some people were seriously injured with shrapnel. Killing people with bombs is difficult for amateurs, even with instructions from the Internet. Guns, on the other hand, are easy to use. They allow even a weak person to project potentially deadly force. This very quality, which makes guns so handy on defense, also allowed a couple of punks to become mass killers at Columbine.

Accordingly, if all guns vanished, crimes like the Columbine massacre would be much less likely to occur. It's true, of course, that criminals would be freer in general to go marauding, with greater assurance that their victims would not resist. This is what has happened in Britain and Australia, as those nations have outlawed defensive gun ownership and confiscated many (but not all) guns. But we are concerned here with policies that would prevent future Columbines, not with gun policy in general.

A second objection is that gun prohibition would devastate civil liberties, and be a miserable failure besides—just as alcohol prohibition in the 1920s and drug prohibition today have failed to prevent the black market from supplying the prohibited goods. True enough. But this objection relates only to the feasibility of the proposal, and does not undercut the fact that effective gun prohibition would probably have prevented Columbine.

And while the curtailing of civil liberties might cause people who venerate the Constitution to recoil, it is not a meaningful objection to anti-gun groups. They push for prohibition all the time, for various classes of guns—automatic machine guns, semi-automatic "assault weapons," small, inexpensive handguns, or all handguns, or .50 caliber rifles, or "sniper rifles."

They also insist that gun owners are too incompetent and emotionally unstable to use guns defensively, and are more likely to kill or maim family members than criminals, so the groups are obviously not inhibited by fear that gun prohibition would empower criminals. No, given their belief in the efficacy of prohibition of certain types of

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guns, their failure to push for total gun prohibition is a failure of nerve and seriousness.

Several months before the Columbine massacre, the killers obtained firearms from two suppliers. The first was a 22-year-old Columbine graduate named Mark Manes (ironically, the son of a longtime Handgun Control, Inc., activist). Manes bought a pistol at a gun show and gave it to the two killers (who were under 18 at the time). Colorado law prohibits giving handguns to juveniles, with certain exceptions, and Manes is currently serving time for this offense in a Colorado prison. The second supplier was an 18-year-old fellow student at Columbine, Robyn Anderson, who bought three long guns for the killers at a Denver-area gun show in December 1998.

When guns are bought from firearms dealers, federal law requires that the sale be approved by the FBI, via the National Instant Check System. Both Manes and Anderson were lawful gun purchasers and could legally have bought the guns from a firearms dealer at a gun store, a gun show, or anywhere else.

In Colorado (as in most other states), when guns are bought from a private individual who is not—as the federal statute says, "engaged in the business" of selling firearms—the National Instant Check System (NICS) and associated paperwork are not involved. If a gun collector sells a pistol to a neighbor or rents a table at a gun show and sells a pair of shotguns one weekend, no FBI permission is required.

Both Manes and Anderson bought guns from collectors at gun shows and thus were not subject to the NICS check, although if they had been, they would have been approved.

The laws described above are exactly the same wherever the firearms transaction takes place. Sales by gun dealers need NICS permission no matter where the sales take place, and sales by private collectors do not.

Nevertheless, shortly after the Columbine killings, the various gun prohibition groups began putting out press releases about the "gun show loophole." This is an audacious lie, since there is no "loophole" involving gun shows. The law at gun shows is *exactly* the same as it is everywhere else.

Mark Manes committed a felony by obtaining a handgun for the young killers. He has never claimed that the existence of another law, regarding gun show sales, would have deterred him.

What about Robyn Anderson?

On June 4, 1999, *Good Morning America* presented a "kids and guns" program. Anderson was flown to Washington for the segment. The first part of the program discussed various proposals, *including background checks on private sales at gun shows.* Immediately after the introductory segment, Diane Sawyer introduced Robyn Anderson and asked:

Anderson was not afraid to divulge her identity when buying a gun for her friends. When asked, "And they actually paid for the guns, or did you?" she replied: "It was their money, yes. All I did was show a driver's license."

"Anything you hear this morning [that would] have stopped you from accompanying them and help[ing] them buy the guns?" Anderson replied: "I guess if it had been illegal, if I had known that it was illegal, I wouldn't have gone." On January 26, 2000, Anderson began claiming that even if the purchase were legal, but there had been a background check of her entirely clean record, she would not have purchased the guns.

Whichever version is true, the facts show that Anderson was *not* afraid to divulge her identity when buying a gun for her wicked friends. When *Good Morning America* asked, "And they actually paid for the guns, or did you?" Anderson replied: "It was their money, yes. All I did was show a driver's license." (The private collectors asked to see a driver's license to verify that she was over 18, even though there was no legal requirement that they do so.) Since Anderson did not mind revealing her identity to three separate sellers, is it realistic to believe that revealing her identity for an instant check would have stopped her? The Colorado instant background check does not keep permanent records on gun buyers, so even with background checks

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on private sales at gun shows, there would have been no permanent record of Anderson's purchase. And Anderson's new and improved talking points claim only that the prospect of a permanent record would have deterred her.

Putting aside Anderson's shifting stories, she is plainly an irresponsible, self-centered person. After the murders took place, she refused to come forward and help the police investigation. It took an anonymous tip for the police to find out about her. And in marked contrast to Mark Manes, Anderson has never apologized for her role in the Columbine murders.

Even if you accept the version of Robyn Anderson's stories that is most supportive of gun control, no gun-show crackdown would have prevented Columbine. The older of the two killers could have bought his own guns in a store legally. Indeed, in a videotape made before the killings, the murderers said that if they had not obtained their guns the way they did, they would have found other ways. There is no reason to disbelieve them on this point.

Some critics worry that allowing teachers to have firearms would lead to accidents. But there has been no increase in gun accidents in the 31 states where adults are allowed to carry handguns for protection in public.

The only law that would have some effect on Robyn Anderson and similar gun molls was introduced in the Colorado legislature this year by Don Lee, a staunchly pro-Second Amendment state representative whose district includes Columbine. His "Robyn Anderson Bill," which will become law within a few weeks, makes it a crime to give a long gun to a juvenile without the consent of his parents. This law covers Anderson's first version of her story, in which she told *Good Morning America* that the only deterrent for her would have been a law making her conduct illegal.

Whatever the other merits of proposals to impose special restrictions on gun shows, these would not have prevented Columbine, and it is cynical for their proponents to use Columbine as a pretext.

National Rifle Association executive vice president Wayne LaPierre—speaking at the NRA's annual meeting in Denver just after the Columbine massacre—said that America's schools should be as gun-free as America's airports.

In contrast, Yale Law professor John Lott has argued forcefully that allowing teachers to possess firearms at school would help prevent, or reduce the fatalities from, school mass murders. Other small gun groups have made arguments similar to Lott's—pointing out, for instance, that Israel abruptly ended terrorist kidnappings of schoolchildren by arming teachers and other responsible adults.

While no American school massacre has ever been stopped by the police, two have been stopped by armed citizens. In 1997 in Pearl, Mississippi, a 16-year-old Satanist murdered his ex-girlfriend and her friend and wounded seven other students at his high school. As he was preparing to leave the high school and kill children at a nearby junior high school, assistant principal Joel Myrick got his .45 handgun from his car, put it to the killer's head, and held him at bay until the police arrived five minutes later.

Not long after, in Edinboro, Pennsylvania, a school rampage abruptly ended when local merchant James Strand used a shotgun to convince the teenage killer to surrender. The teenager had killed one teacher and wounded one teacher and two classmates.

The objections to encouraging teachers to protect themselves and their students are vacuous. First, there is the complaint that armed teachers would send the message that it's okay to possess guns. True enough, although this same message is also sent by the presence of armed police officers in school. In any case, we expect schools to be able to explain the distinction between adults doing something and children doing it.

Some critics worry that allowing teachers to have firearms would lead to accidents. But there has been no increase in gun accidents in the 31 states where adults are allowed to carry handguns for protection in public. Moreover, accident concerns could be addressed by specially

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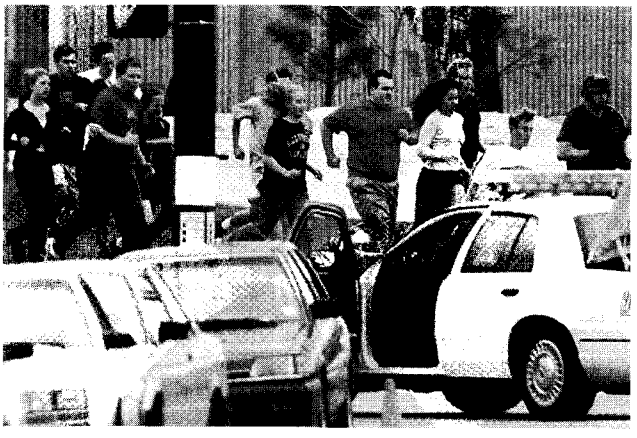
stringent rules about gun storage, locking, or concealment. And it would take a lot of accidents to exceed the death toll inflicted by current policy, which guarantees that mass killers at school face no effective resistance.

One teacher in the Jefferson County School District, which includes Columbine, has written a detailed proposal for arming 10 percent of school staffs, with only the principal knowing which teachers and other staff members have firearms. Most teachers would not want to be armed, but as long as some are, students would be protected by guardians with the highest possible motivation. No one has a stronger motivation to save a victim's life than does the victim himself. In contrast to police officers who are safe as long as they stay outside a school where murders are in progress, teachers inside the building are already in danger and well motivated to stop a killer. Moreover, most teachers also have great personal affection for the students in their care.

Curt Lavarello, executive director of the National Association of School Resource Officers (whose members have never stopped a single school shooting), contends that teacher firearms training would cost millions of dollars.

Well, training teachers in order to prevent teachers and students from being killed seems rather a good use of millions of dollars. Besides, there are tens of thousands of certified firearms instructors in the United States who would gladly donate time to instruct teachers for free. Six days of training (a pair of long weekends) will give a teacher more firearms training than is required for active-duty police officers in many jurisdictions. You might think one of the major gun groups would speak in support of such a proposal, but they have turned out to be not as tough as their reputations.



The pro- and anti-gun groups failed to push for serious anti-Columbine laws because their polling told them that the vast majority of the American public could not bear to hear such proposals.

If Columbine really mattered, this past year would have been spent in a passionate and edifying debate on total gun prohibition versus guns as lifesaving tools to protect schoolchildren. Instead, we have had a ridiculous debate about 72-hour "instant" background checks on private sales at gun shows versus 24-hour checks. The year could have been spent discussing the need for new police protocols in Columbine-like situations, or serious self-defense measures like the arming of teachers. Instead, we have seen the police posing in heroic pictures for *Time* magazine with the killers' guns, as if they had been seized in combat, not picked up after the killers' suicides.

What Columbine reveals about us is that America, in the words of Jeffrey Snyder's 1993 essay in the *Public Interest*, has become to a remarkable degree "A Nation of Cowards."

Consider: Heavily armored police with machine guns protected themselves, instead of rescuing teenagers who were being murdered a few yards away. Except for two talk show hosts, the Colorado and national media virtually ignored this reprehensible failure to act.

The anti-gun groups failed to push for the one item in their arsenal that could have prevented Columbine.

The major pro-gun groups failed to push for the one item in their arsenal that could have prevented Columbine.

And the worst of it is this: The leaders of these groups flinched not out of personal weakness but because both were pandering to congressmen who themselves lacked the nerve to take Columbine seriously. And these members of Congress were chosen in free elections by the American people, whose own lack of seriousness they well represent.

The pro- and anti-gun groups failed to push for serious anti-Columbine laws because their polling told them that the vast majority of the American public could not bear to hear such proposals.

And so, if there are two more people in America with hearts as depraved and souls as evil as the Columbine killers, your children and mine are just as much at risk as they were the day before Columbine. ♦

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Among the Crusaders

The saga of a Columbine father, an Illinois carpenter, and their evangelical roadshow.

By Matt Labash

Stanford, Kentucky

Some say he's just plain crazy. But Greg Zanis says he's crazy for crosses. He thinks of them while he's awake, and sees them in his dreams. At his Aurora, Illinois, home, he has them in his backyard for his dead pets, and in his china cabinet next to the Trans Am models. "I live crosses, I breathe crosses, I eat crosses," he says. Literally, it seems. "Sometimes, I even cut my hamburger patty out to look like a cross," Zanis admits. "I don't know what's wrong with me. I'm a cross-o-maniac or something."

It's understandable. After all, Greg is the Cross Man, best known for his memorial erected after the Columbine massacre. But it started about four years ago, when Zanis, 49, began a cross-building hobbyhorse called Crosses for Losses on top of his $80,000-a-year carpentry business. The name suited him, for Greg knew about crosses. He grew up around crosses—beautiful and Byzantine—as the son of a Greek Orthodox priest named Stavros ("*stavros*" being Greek for "cross"). Greg also knows about losses. He lost his dignity at Geneva High School in Illinois, as a non-athletic, helium-voiced Greek kid ridiculed by sturdier WASPs who called him "Zorba" and worse (his father's advice on confrontation was "Always run"). Then he lost the respect of his family when he became a born-again Christian in the late '70s. Zanis says they thought he'd lost a screw, which is confirmed by his estranged brother Chris, whom I accidentally reach while searching for Greg. Chris, who's had periodic trouble with the law (Greg calls him "my Billy Carter"), volunteers a profanity-riddled rundown of his brother's frailties: from his spotty church attendance to pot usage. Greg freely admits this, but says it's well behind him. "I could've lost my family," Greg says of his evil-weed chapter.

Greg's biggest loss, however, came in 1996, when he went to the house of his father-in-law, a wealthy landlord who was also his best friend and carpentry mentor. Zanis found him dead—face down in a pool of blood, shot in the eye by thieving ex-tenants. Even today when he recounts the episode, Greg's tannery-issued skin turns sallow. It was then he went on a cross-building mission. He planted crosses in front yards and by highways. Wherever tragedy struck, whether from homicides or car accidents, Zanis set out under cloak of night, planting crosses for gangbangers and drunks and innocent victims, at no cost to the families. He regarded it not just as a commemorative act, but as a witness. "I don't plant crosses for the dead, I plant them for the living," he says. He also puts Stars of David up for Jews, crescents for Muslims, even flames for atheists, not because he agrees with them, but as an act of kindness to grieving strangers, to show them "what Christianity is about."

But Greg didn't *really* become the Cross Man, as seen on *Inside Edition* and the *Today* show, until last year. Greg, his wife, and their five children were taking their first vacation in over a decade, renting a house with an in-ground pool in Kissimmee, Florida. When Greg got a call from Littleton residents after the shootings, he bailed on the Disney vacation, drove back to Aurora, and went to Home Depot, where he's a regular in the pressure-treated lumber department.

Greg spent the rest of the night fashioning 15 eight-foot crosses from knotholed pine; then he and his teenage son loaded his pickup truck and drove straight through to Littleton. There, they anonymously planted the crosses—13 for the victims, 2 for the killers—atop Rebel Hill, the Clement Park elevation that overlooks the school. And they went home. The crosses became the enduring image of the Columbine shootings. While thousands flocked to them—weeping, inscribing, leaving stuffed mementos—others were enraged Zanis had included crosses for the killers. Zanis, who maintains the Bible mandates forgiveness even when it hasn't been asked for, differentiated the killers' crosses so subtly that most missed it: He wrote the murderers' names in Greek script—to "mark them as heathens," since Greeks, in the New Testament, always represented the ungodly. But the distinction was lost on Brian Rohrbough, father of murdered Daniel, who maintains that there is no forgiveness without repentance, and a double suicide after 13 homicides doesn't count.

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AP/Wide World Photos

Darrell Scott, whose daughter Rachel was killed at Columbine High

Rohrbough went to Rebel Hill and removed the killers' crosses, chopping them up with his circular saw and throwing them in a dumpster. When word reached Zanis, he returned to Columbine, ascended the hill, and took the rest of his crosses home. "The scene was desecrated," says Zanis. But before he even reached Aurora, hundreds of people had called Zanis to ask him to return the 13 crosses. He constructed a second set (minus the two killers', a concession to the families) and took them back to Rebel Hill. Eventually, park officials took the second set into custody, after church-state segregationists complained.

As soon as Zanis gets his second set sprung from a federal warehouse, he says, they're promised to the Smithsonian. And while Sotheby's has been panting to auction off the originals, Zanis doesn't want the money. Instead, he keeps the crosses in the back of his Chevy Silverado, vowing that the final resting place for "my babies" will be a 13-story nickel-and-glass Cross Building in Littleton. Greg keeps a model of the building, fashioned from aluminum ducts, in his woodshop. And if all goes according to plan, and the funds can be raised to erect the building on a donated parcel, Greg says there will be a floor for every victim, filled with the shrineside memorabilia that blanketed the park, perhaps even featuring the bedrooms of the departed, assuming the parents consent to have their children's rooms severed from their homes and transported to this "living memorial."

If Greg's well-intentioned plan seems a tad morbid, it ranks pretty low on the scale of random acts of tastelessness that have followed on the Columbine tragedy. The children hadn't even been buried before the suckerfish moved in to score polemic points on everything from gun control to school vouchers. The sheriff's department, slow to disclose much (its final report is seven months overdue), managed to let fly, without presenting evidence, that it was likely Cassie Bernall was not the one who said "yes" she believed in God before getting shot in the head. Even the parents behaved questionably. The Klebolds threatened to sue the sheriff's department for not warning them that their son was associating with his co-murderer, Eric Harris. And Michael Shoels, father of the slain Isaiah, hooked up with Dr. Kevorkian's attorney, leveled wild-eyed government conspiracy charges, and threatened to sue the school system and nine law enforcement agencies, boycott the United Way, and embark with James Brown on a "Let's Stomp Out Hate" tour.

But the first anniversary of the April 20 massacre threatens to take the prize. So many journalists are planning to envelop Littleton that one victim's family told me their relatives can't get a hotel room. The Jefferson County school system has trademarked the anniversary logo "A Time to Remember, A Time to Hope," as if it were a prom theme. Grief counselors are warning that even non-victims who watch television coverage can experience "trauma triggers." And all manner of publicity jockeys are conducting events like the Columbine Memorial 5K Run, where entrants can pay $20 and receive a T-shirt, a "Winning Time chip," and a "special hope and remembrance bib."

There is, however, another subculture flourishing in the aftermath of Columbine. It is by no means devoid of publicity-hungry opportunism, but opportunism seeking eternal, as well as temporal, advantages. Since nearly half the victims were devout Christians, and since the killers left behind much evidence to suggest they were targeting Christians, tales of the students' lives have taken on a life of their own. Despite the Cassie controversy, her parents' book about their daughter's faith became a *New York Times* bestseller. There is now a network of "Yes I Believe" Bible study groups, and a play depicting Cassie's life is being performed in churches nationwide.

Then there is, indelicate as it sounds, the Columbine roadshow. This nationwide revival tour is helmed by Darrell Scott, father of the murdered Rachel Scott, herself a devout Christian who had actually spoken about Christ to Klebold and Harris. Scott, the son of a Pentecostal minister, has quit his job as a food-sales manager to hit the sawdust trail and spread what old-time revivalists like to call the Good News. Meeting up with Scott at most of his stops is the Cross Man, displaying the original Columbine crosses.

In addition, Scott has started the Columbine Redemption foundation (see pictures of his daughter's gravesite at *www.thecolumbineredemption.com*), co-written a book called *Rachel's Tears*, and even launched, in what skeptics will likely find a cringe-inducing endeavor, *Rachel's Journal*, a monthly magazine containing entries from Rachel's journals.

The magazine, the book, and the roadshow all spring from Rachel's diaries, which her parents found after her death. One was discovered in her backpack at Columbine,

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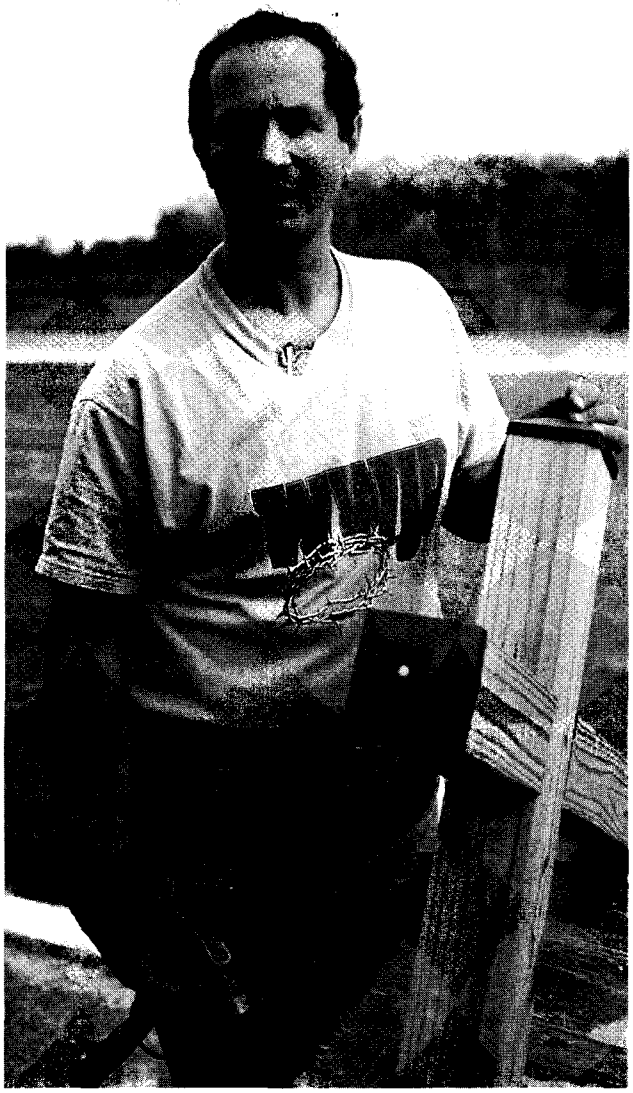

AP/Wide World Photos

Greg Zanis, building a cross near Big Rock, Ill.

a bullet-hole through the cover. While some of her writings and illustrations are emotive juvenilia, others are chillingly premonitory. A drawing done half an hour before her death shows her eyes crying 13 tears, which are watering a rose. The rest of her writing is the astonishing interior monologue of a 17-year-old girl wrestling with God, as the Psalmist did, and struggling to subjugate her earthly fears and desires so that her life (or, as it turned out, her death) would be used to bring others to Him.

Greg and Darrell first met at Rachel's grave shortly after the shooting. Since then, Greg has been on the road, showing his crosses, for 300 days. His business has gone to seed, his family is strangled by debt. To finance his Columbine habit, he has taken out a $100,000 home equity loan. He says he's $2,000 away from going broke, so he's now "walking on faith." Several people I talk to liken Greg to John the Baptist. "Why?" he asks when I inform him of this. "Because I'm sweaty?" Not exactly. Like most itinerant prophets, Greg is slightly unhinged. And as we hop into his truck for the nine-hour hike to Darrell's next preaching gig in Stanford, Kentucky, Greg's eccentricities are laid bare. To save money, Greg sleeps in his truck. On warm nights, he sleeps in the back, right on the crosses. He rarely stays in hotels, because he doesn't want to lie in beds where prostitutes have "done their business." On the rare occasions he comes in from the elements, Greg will sleep only in the bathtub. No hotel, of course, means no shower, which is why Greg has perfected what he calls his "Toilet Shower." The technique involves taking his cooler into a rest-stop, filling it with water, proceeding into a roomy handicapped stall, and sponging himself off onto the floor. "I like to be clean," he says.

While John the Baptist ate locusts and honey, Greg is less discriminating. His Playmate cooler is packed so that he can subsist out of cans: corn niblets, Bumblebee tuna mixed with tomato paste, Louisiana Perfect hot sauce (which he takes straight, like Binaca), and Lady Lee chili hot beans. I beg Greg not to eat the Lady Lee while I'm in his cab, and as I promise a big day on expense account, his only request is breakfast—Whoppers at Burger King. After he brushes his teeth without water, wiping the bristles on the five-inch cuff of his jeans, he is full of highway tales. One night, while sleeping in a stadium parking lot in the Texas panhandle, he awoke to the shotgun blasts of coyote hunters, who nearly blew the windows out of his truck. Then there was the time he traveled to a Teen Mania revival where the organizers wanted to display the Columbine crosses through a concert-style pyrotechnic wall of fire. "I carried my crosses out of there three at a time," he snarls. "I was gone."

It's all worthwhile, he says, especially at night, after the revivals. "I'm sleeping by the crosses, I'm witnessing all night long," he says. Greg is often jarred from sleep, as "men will come to the crosses at night and cry. They won't do it in front of their wives or girlfriends." His family misses him, but they seem to understand he must carry the crosses, even as Christ roamed the countryside before he went to the cross. "I've got it easy," says Greg. "He took a donkey or walked. I get to drive."

Lately, however, the road's been wearing Greg down. Greg is not stoic. He has grievances—including lots against Darrell Scott. Though Greg refuses to sign a contract with Darrell, he says Darrell hasn't been paying him the agreed $1,000 a week, and even that wouldn't go far. It costs $500 a week to stay on the road eating Lady Lee. Though the sum Greg says Darrell owes frequently changes, it ranges up to $40,000. Greg says Darrell told him recently he didn't have the money to cut him a $2,000 check, though Darrell makes as much as $5,000 an appearance (not including airfare and hotel). If Darrell doesn't have the money, Greg wonders, why did Darrell just buy a new Mercedes?

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Greg, it seems, is given to slight exaggeration. Darrell actually leased a Mercedes, only after he and his wife traded in their two cars. Forty thousand dollars is about $34,000 more than Darrell says he owes Greg for services rendered—and he's not contractually obligated to pay him anything. While Darrell can make up to $5,000 an appearance, the money goes to his foundation, he says, and he's had to skip checks himself to pay his contract employees. His salary is less than he made as a food salesman.

Listening to the complaints, I feel as if I've stumbled onto the evangelical equivalent of Martin and Lewis's sunset years, as the act was about to unravel. Darrell and Greg are booked well into the fall, but feelings have been hurt, allegiances betrayed. Still, amidst the lolling hills in the Knobs region of Kentucky, with the bluegrass, freshly cut, looking like two-toned velour, the roadshow goes on. In the Lincoln County High School gym, the Baptist Association is hosting about 2,000 attendees for a week-long revival that will feature marquee names like Miss Kentucky and a Channel 36 newscaster. But tonight is Columbine night. Greg unloads the cross pedestals first, then checks his laminated lineup sheet to place the crosses in correct order, 13 abreast in the lobby. As he does so, gawkers congregate, tearing up, unable to articulate the power of the crosses that were once a stack of wood in an Aurora Home Depot, but that are now something else entirely.

Several hundred people will flood the court during the altar call, as if the basketball team had just won the state championship.

Inside, the bleachers fill, as the choir—a sea of pastel jackets and henna rinses—softly sings "Beulah Land." Darrell takes the stage, and after a day of listening to Greg's complaints, I half expect him to start pitching timeshares at a Jesus-themed waterpark. But, except for the "Rachel's Tears" T-shirt concession in the lobby, I'm pleasantly surprised. It's clear that whatever his faults, Darrell Scott is a man who believes. He believes there is a reason why, a year ago, he kept hearing the words "a spiritual event" as he went to a holding pen for anxious parents after the shooting—where he watched the last surviving child get off the last bus and saw that she was not his daughter. He believes that God still talks through people, and that He spoke through Rachel, and that the reason Darrell is leading this awkward life—where tragedy becomes vocation—is that it's his job to relate his daughter's words—words like "God, I want you to use me to reach the unreached"—to anyone who'll listen. Darrell Scott believes that souls are at stake, that today's decisions hold eternal consequences. And he believes that when Greg rustles up volunteers to carry the Columbine crosses to the front of the stage, people might actually understand this. Darrell believes that because his daughter did something as simple as go to school last April 20, now, a year later, several hundred people here in rural Kentucky will flood the court during the altar call, as if the basketball team had just won the state championship, and stand before the crosses.

Darrell gives the invitation, and only one person comes. He presses for more, and though souls have been stirred, there are no additional takers. Finally, Wayne Bristow, the host evangelist, takes the microphone, and does what any good evangelist who learned his craft in Muleshoe, Texas, would do. Wayne draws the net, as the pros say. Wayne is a closer. A few words, a few prayers, and before you know it, the gym rumbles with the sounds of 250 or so people stomping down the wooden bleachers to stand before the crosses, to meet with counselors in the cafeteria, and to make decisions that will affect their lives here, and perhaps in the hereafter.

After the service, things get messy. Greg and I adjourn to a nearby Denny's. Darrell hunts us down, as he's desperate to discuss business with Greg. Greg has been ducking Darrell, as he is not anxious to hear Darrell's bad news: that some Columbine victims' families oppose Greg's participation in any April 20 commemorations in Littleton because Greg has gradually abandoned his pledge not to post crosses for the killers. While he never does so with the victims' families present, Greg often plants two minuscule crosses in holes next to the 13 crosses when he's traveling outside Colorado. There are other things to hash out—such as Darrell's desire to get Greg under contract and retain ownership of the crosses—but not in front of a reporter. So Darrell slides into our booth and waits impatiently as Greg finishes his omelet. Darrell insists we drive back to the Holiday Inn Express, a half-mile away, where they will get rid of me well after midnight. They go at it in the parking lot for over an hour.

It feels a bit like a drug deal gone bad, and such pettiness might seem to diminish the message. Then again, biblical precedent suggests that God's had plenty of practice delivering His message through imperfect messengers. David was a wife-stealer, and Noah was not above sprawling naked while tying on a drunk. Peter was a coward, and Paul, before becoming an *über*-Christian, used to murder Christians by the dozen. If God can use cowards and adulterers, lushes and killers, surely He can work with two messengers haggling over the crosses of dead children in a Holiday Inn parking lot. ♦

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The Boy Scouts' Day in Court

The Supreme Court hears a high stakes case over gay scoutmasters. Will freedom of association prevail?

By Joe Loconte

On April 26, the Supreme Court will be told that one of America's premier character-building organizations, the Boy Scouts of America, has drifted dangerously into the woods of bigotry. By expelling an openly gay scoutmaster in New Jersey, the Scouts allegedly violated state anti-discrimination laws. The proposed remedy: Reinstate him.

Because the Boy Scouts has won nearly every major court challenge so far, it's easy to overlook what is at stake—ultimately, the absorption of private associations into the bureaucratic state. At issue is not just one organization's 90-year tradition of grooming young boys to be "morally straight." If the Supreme Court upholds the decision for the gay plaintiff by New Jersey's highest court, it will rewrite the constitutional protections of free speech, free association, and free exercise of religion. "If the Scouts lose, then there is no freedom of association left," says Michael McConnell, one of the lawyers defending the group. And since most Scout troops are sponsored by churches, "nothing stands in the way of religious associations' being coerced to disband or violate their tenets," warns Nathan Diament in a brief filed by the Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations of America. "This is not about the Boy Scouts," says Princeton political philosopher Robert George. "This is about the meaning of human sexuality. It's about the meaning of human life. This is as big as it gets."

Apocalyptic melodrama? Maybe, but it's not just social conservatives who see the horsemen over the horizon. "I don't like to see the law used as a battering ram," says Jonathan Rauch, writer-in-residence at the Brookings Institution. Richard Sincere, president of a gay rights group in Washington, D.C., warns the case "could backfire": "If the New Jersey Court can assert for itself that kind of authority—if they can redefine what your beliefs are—then civil society is at risk."

The case of *The Boy Scouts of America* v. *Dale* goes back to 1990, when James Dale was a 20-year-old assistant scoutmaster in Matawan, New Jersey. After Dale was featured in a local newspaper as a leader of a gay rights organization, the Monmouth Council of the Boy Scouts ousted him. Dale sued and won, and last year the New Jersey Supreme Court unanimously upheld his reinstatement. Now the Boy Scouts of America has appealed to the Supreme Court. Lining up behind the Scouts is an unlikely coalition that includes the Mormon Church, the U.S. Catholic Conference, the Family Research Council, Agudath Israel, and Gays and Lesbians for Individual Liberty. Representing Dale in this microcosm of the culture war is the Lambda Legal Defense and Education Fund, joined by, among others, the American Civil Liberties Union, the National Organization for Women, People for the American Way, the American Federation of Teachers, and the American Psychological Association.

The briefs on both sides address the main arguments of the New Jersey ruling: that the Boy Scouts is not exempt from state laws requiring equal treatment of homosexuals because (1) it is not really a private organization, (2) it has not maintained a clear position against homosexuality, and (3) its mission will not be affected by its accepting gay leaders. Each of these arguments carries sweeping implications.

For 20 years, the Boy Scouts has fended off anti-discrimination charges by invoking exemption as a private association exercising its First Amendment rights. But not this time. The New Jersey court called the Scouts a "public accommodation" under a state law barring discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation. (Ten other states have similar laws, with loopholes for private and religious groups.) To reach this conclusion, the judges

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relied on the fact that a small minority of troops—fewer than 10 percent nationally—are chartered by public institutions such as schools and fire departments, which provide leadership and a place to meet. This, added to the Scouts' large membership—4.8 million—and public recruiting, gives them what the Lambda brief calls "an extraordinary partnership with government."

The Boy Scouts has always insisted it is a private group. It takes no government money and is composed mainly of volunteers. The vast majority of troops have non-governmental sponsors—nearly 65 percent are sponsored by religious bodies. Scouts meet in groups ranging from 5 to 30 boys. Troops are organized by parents, led by parents, and hosted in homes, churches, and synagogues as well as schools. "That's the genius of the Scouts," says Harvard law professor Mary Ann Glendon. "You're talking about very small troops here and very intimate relationships. It's as close to the family as you get."

Briefs for the Scouts also note that the 1964 Civil Rights Act and most states define the word "place" in public accommodation law to mean, for the most part, places—buildings, lodges, and other facilities. Four state supreme courts and the 7th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals have ruled that Scouting is not a place of public accommodation. The briefs also cite *Hurley* v. *Irish-American Gay, Lesbian & Bisexual Group of Boston*, a crucial 1995 case in which the Supreme Court ruled that Massachusetts' public accommodation law could not be used to force the organizers of a St. Patrick's Day parade to admit gay marchers. Even though the parade took place on public streets, its organizers were exempted from the law on First Amendment grounds.

The second rationale for subjecting the Scouts to anti-discrimination laws is that the organization isn't really opposed to homosexuality. Under the New Jersey decision, a civic group could be compelled to accept gays in leadership positions unless its opposition to homosexuality functioned as a "unifying associational goal." The Scouts, however, lacked a "clear, particular, and consistent message concerning homosexuality."

True, the judges conceded, the Scout oath—to keep oneself "physically strong, mentally awake, and morally straight"—is recited at nearly every meeting and ceremony; and a 1994 national position paper plainly stated, "The Boy Scouts of America has always taught youth the traditional values of Scouting families. We do not believe that a person who engages in homosexual conduct provides a role model consistent with those values."

Nevertheless, the attorneys for Dale simply deny that "morally straight" implies anything about sexuality. They also claim that statements about gays haven't circulated outside Scout leadership circles. "To just take a person and throw him out on the basis of a policy no one has seen, that's discrimination," says the Lambda Legal Foundation's Evan Wolfson, lead counsel for Dale. "Most members would be shocked to learn about the policy."

Actually, what might shock parents of Boy Scouts more is the suggestion that they have entrusted their children to an organization ambivalent about traditional morality. It's true the Boy Scouts takes a "don't ask, don't tell" approach to gays; there is no witch hunt to ferret them out. Yet whenever Scout leaders have openly announced their homosexuality, they have been dismissed.

The charge that the Boy Scouts lacks a "consistent message" on gays appears to mean they simply aren't loud enough about their anti-homosexuality to merit First Amendment protection. By that reasoning, venomous hate groups would qualify for exemption, while those that quietly affirm traditional marriage wouldn't—not exactly a recipe for a kinder, gentler nation. Says Rauch: "That strikes me as fairly perverse: If you're going to be anti-gay, do it right. Great."

But it is the third argument—that the forcible inclusion of gay scoutmasters won't affect the group's message—that invites the most grievous attack on civil liberties. For Dale and his defenders would give government the right to reinterpret the beliefs and mission of a private organization.

Thus, the Lambda brief issues this bald assertion: "Dale or another openly gay scoutmaster can fully teach the positive message of family values and sexual responsibility that BSA emphasizes." The Boy Scouts of America finds this claim mystifying: Its approach to "family values" is to stress abstinence, fidelity, and traditional marriage as the ideal for young boys growing into manhood. Scout officials

Patrick Arrasmith

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contend that openly homosexual scoutmasters cannot "fully teach" what they do not even partially believe.

The way the organization teaches, furthermore, is through relationships: adults befriending and mentoring young boys. The *Boy Scout Handbook* explains that Scouts will come to know their scoutmaster as "a wise friend to whom [they] can always turn for advice"—whether they're sharing a tent, stoking a fire, or hiking through the woods. Scout documents call the selection of leaders "the most important decision to be made" by would-be sponsors. How could it be otherwise? The principle behind Scouting—which founder Lord Robert Baden-Powell called a "character factory"—is that the wise adult friend will deliberately model the organization's most basic values.

Lambda lawyers, following the New Jersey court, simply refuse to accept the Boy Scouts' own understanding of its mission—and have rewritten it to their own liking. And this goes to the heart of First Amendment protections. "If there is any star in our constitutional constellation," said the Supreme Court in a 1943 case, "it is that no official, high or petty, can prescribe what shall be orthodox." In the *Hurley* case, the Court ruled that parade organizers were engaged in "expressive conduct" and could exclude voices they found distasteful. Lambda's reasoning represents a frontal assault on the free speech and free association rights of all who participate in Scouting.

Lambda lawyers, following the New Jersey court, simply refuse to accept the Boy Scouts' own understanding of its mission.

And it signals even more. Because the Boy Scouts has a root connection to religion, a ruling against the organization would muzzle participants' free exercise of religion. The practical business of sponsorship already has been noted. Most of the roughly 145,000 Boy Scout units are chartered by the Catholic Church, the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, the National Council of Young Israel, or other religious entities. The United Methodist Church alone sponsors 424,000 Scouts. Church sponsors typically provide meeting space, while ministers help choose leaders or organize volunteers. The Mormons have incorporated Scouting into their priesthood training for young men.

Beyond the practical, however, is a deeper alliance: a religious vision for life. True, the Boy Scouts doesn't call itself a religious organization and doesn't push a specific faith. The *Scoutmaster Handbook* says Scouting "encourages no particular affiliation, nor assumes functions of religious bodies." Nevertheless, the organization always has made belief in God its starting point. This is explicit in the Scout oath, which begins, "On my honor I will do my best to do my duty to God"—repeated at virtually every meeting, every week, by every Scout. Atheists have been ousted for refusing to recite it.

As scoutmasters explain, the hook for boys is the chance to learn outdoor survival skills. But what they pick up in the process are old-fashioned virtues, grounded in reverence for the Creator. "We surely expect of every boy that he shall have some form or other of religion," Baden-Powell told an American audience, "and that he shall practice what he preaches." The Scout code of ethics plainly supports historic Judeo-Christian morality—hence its strong church appeal.

This is precisely what the New Jersey court found so repellent: The Scouts' policy on gays is the product of what the judges contemptuously called "archaic moral views." They likened the exclusion of gays to white supremacy and the subjugation of women, then delivered a secular sermon on the evils of discrimination: "We are satisfied that the Boy Scouts' expulsion of Dale is based on little more than prejudice. . . . The sad truth is that excluded groups and individuals have been prevented from full participation in the social, economic, and political life of our country. The human price of this bigotry has been enormous."

The Supreme Court of New Jersey not only placed itself at odds with the millions of Scouting parents and supporters whose churches officially uphold biblical teaching about sexuality and marriage. It branded this teaching "invidious"—and sought to outlaw it. "They think religious views of sex are as irrational as the racial views of Alabama restaurant owners in the 1950s," says Princeton's Robert George. "To them it's simple bigotry." The triumph of this view in the Supreme Court would be a major step toward a public culture that privatizes all religious conviction.

If that happens, here's a look ahead: State judges, emboldened by the Court and new anti-discrimination laws, would move against other organizations and institutions nurtured by religious values, against counselors at maternity homes, directors of homeless shelters, eventually teachers in parish schools. Bit by bit, religious freedom would be restricted to worship services and ceremonies. Nearly everything else a church did, or that religious believers did, would be constrained by public laws. "Once they establish the principle that you can't practice your dissent, they will undermine and attack these religious organizations directly," George says. "In the name of freedom they will wipe out freedom."

The case is already being made in the elite law schools.

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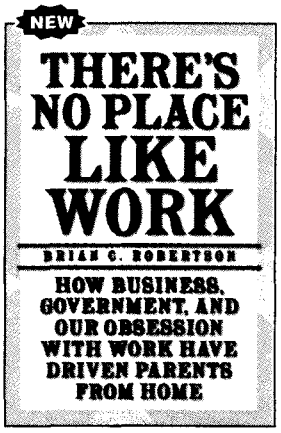
In a 1996 issue of the *Cornell Law Review*, for example, University of Michigan professor Jane Rutherford argues for equality as "the primary constitutional value." The policy implication: Employment discrimination laws must be applied to religious bodies. "When the government authorizes religious institutions to discriminate, it impinges on the constitutional rights of those excluded," writes Rutherford. "The First Amendment should not be permitted to be used as a shield to protect such subordinating conduct."

And there are signs that such thinking is taking hold. Catholic Charities has surrendered its hiring policies to state civil rights laws. The ACLU—once a defender of civic groups against government meddling—has filed suit after suit to get gays and atheists into the Boy Scouts. "The ACLU does cherish the right of a group to define itself," says Lenora Lapidus, legal director of the New Jersey ACLU, a shade defensively, "but the government has a compelling interest in eradicating discrimination."

But what else gets eradicated in the process? Neither free speech nor free association is an absolute right, yet both are grounded in what the Founders considered the touchstone of liberty: freedom of conscience. James Madison, the mind behind the First Amendment, called conscience "the most sacred of all property." For it is individual conviction that informs speech, motivates assembling, and shapes religious expression: For rulers to bully conscience, wrote Thomas Jefferson in his famous "Bill for Establishing Religious Freedom" in Virginia, is "impious presumption."

What a wiser generation rejected as tyranny, Dale's defenders hail as a "compelling state interest." Here is the problem with making anti-discrimination laws the weapon du jour in the culture wars. With a cache of compelling interests and a definition of "public accommodation" as spongy as the Stay-Puft Marshmallow Man, renegade courts will extend the reach of these laws indefinitely. The endgame is the flattening of civil society, as government remakes one institution after another in its own secular, egalitarian image. Now is a good time for the Supreme Court, in the name of conscience and common sense, to stop it. ♦

Think about it.



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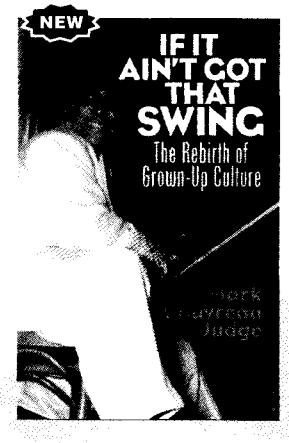

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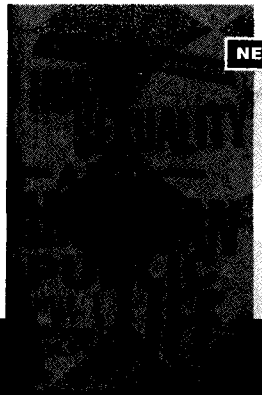

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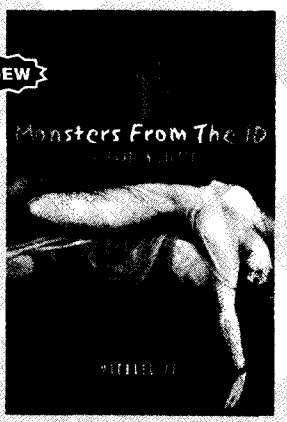

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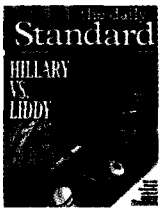

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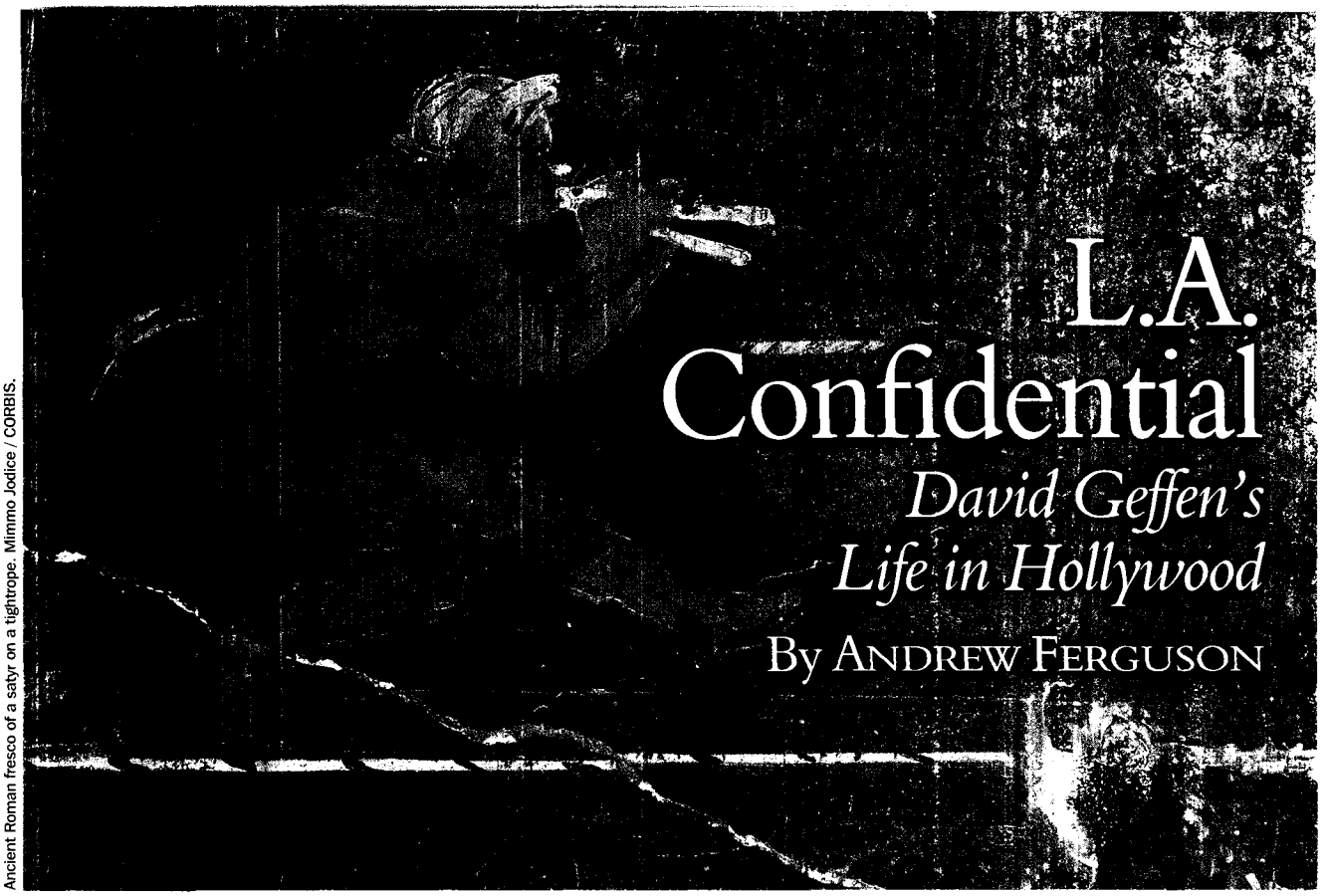

Ancient Roman fresco of a satyr on a tightrope. Mimmo Jodice / CORBIS.

L.A. Confidential

David Geffen's Life in Hollywood

By Andrew Ferguson

Tom King's *The Operator: David Geffen Builds, Buys, and Sells the New Hollywood* is one of those books that is more interesting as an artifact than as a thing to be read. King works in the Los Angeles bureau of the *Wall Street Journal*, and a few years ago he got an idea—something that rarely happens to reporters who cover show business. He would write a biography of David Geffen, the most successful entertainment entrepreneur since the movie moguls of Hollywood's golden era. Geffen's story is ripe for retelling. His career spans three decades and more—from his beginning as a musician's agent in the late 1960s (the discoverer of the Eagles and mentor to Joni Mitchell) to his present perch as founder, with fellow megalomaniacs Jeffrey Katzenberg and Steven Spielberg, of the Hollywood studio DreamWorks SKG.

When King first approached him, Geffen was reluctant to cooperate. He had a change of heart, however, when he read a biography of his hero Warren Buffett, which also happened to be written by a *Wall Street Journal* reporter, a colleague of King's. To Geffen, the parallels with Buffett were obvious. Buffett is a billionaire; so is Geffen. Buffett lives in Omaha; Geffen lives in Malibu. Buffett is a mild-mannered family man; Geffen is a tightly wound homosexual, famous for his promiscuity and incendiary rages. Buffett acquired his fortune providing capital to businesses that have made the lives of Americans safer, more convenient, and more productive; Geffen produced *Dreamgirls*. Buffett has two f's in his last name; so does Geffen. And so on. Having his biography penned by a *Journal* reporter would make the parallels complete. Geffen agreed to cooperate. He submitted to many interviews with King, and encouraged dozens of his friends and associates—old lovers, business colleagues, school pals, even his childhood psychologist—to do likewise.

The Operator
David Geffen Builds, Buys, and Sells the New Hollywood
by Tom King
Random House, 670 pp., $25.95

The exhaustive cooperation was in keeping with an adage Geffen likes to repeat. He first heard it years ago at a friend's Alcoholics Anonymous meeting: "You're only as sick as your secrets." This means, by Geffen's interpretation, that a fellow shouldn't have secrets; the adage is a counsel to constant self-exposure. For example, Geffen often entertains strangers and new acquaintances with tales of his sexual doings, and King was no exception. He made sure his biographer knew that on the night Geffen's client John Lennon was killed, he, Geffen, had been whooping it up with a male prostitute, if "whooping it up" is the correct term. And he made sure King knew all about his affair with Cher, whom Geffen dated in the 1970s. Back in those days Geffen still considered himself bisexual, apparently not realizing that anyone, boy or girl, who finds Cher attractive is by definition gay. "I f—d her countless times," Geffen told King. What can I say? The man is c-l-a-s-s.

But anyway, it turns out that it's not sick for a fellow to keep some secrets—like the secret that your brother hates your guts. That's a secret you can try to keep secret. Geffen's relationship with his biographer went rocky when he learned that King was off to see Mitchell Geffen, David's estranged brother. King tells the story in the foreword to *The Operator*. "Tom, you agreed not to talk to him!" Geffen erupted over the phone to King. (*Erupted* is King's

Andrew Ferguson is a senior editor at The Weekly Standard.

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word; Geffen never talks in the book, he "bellows," "screams," "shouts," "cries hysterically." It's the loudest show-biz biography since *The Ethel Merman Story*.) "David," Tom responded, "do you think I would write this book and agree not to talk with your brother?" It was their first spat but not their last.

Eventually, after about a year, David decided to stop cooperating altogether. Tom still isn't sure why. It happened like this. One evening, Tom was at home, busy putting on his Abraham Lincoln costume. (It was *Halloween*. There was a big *party*.) The phone rang. It was David, who said, very calmly, I'm not cooperating with you. And that was it. Just like that. And there's Tom, who is thirty-two years old, standing there with half an Abe Lincoln beard epoxied to his face! Can you imagine? Anyway, despite this, David's friends and associates continued to talk with Tom for the book (although several of them, according to *New York* magazine, forwarded transcripts or tapes of their interviews with Tom to David). And David's secretary continued to provide phone numbers for anyone Tom was trying to reach. Go figure.

But the man himself went into a dead man's float. He roused briefly last year, after King sent him a manuscript of the finished biography. He faxed the author: "Let's just leave it that much of the book is fiction." Then David started working the phones. The telephone is Geffen's instrument; he wields it the way Sammy Sosa swings a baseball bat. By all accounts, he averages more than a hundred calls a day. He talked with the editor in chief of Time, Inc., whose *People* magazine was running an excerpt of *The Operator* (the scrumptious chapter about Cher), and then he called a big-dog editor at the *Wall Street Journal*, which was also running an excerpt. He called the chief executive of Random House, the book's publisher, and he called the chairman of Bertelsmann AG, which owns Random House. He called lots of people. There's nothing unusual about this. David Geffen had gotten books killed in the past, and has gotten others rewritten before publication in ways more pleasing to him. Complaining to publishers is just one of the things powerful people do.

And even if it doesn't result in altering the book—and it didn't in this case, apparently—the tactic never fails to create buzz. "Buzz" is a show business term for "excited talk on a subject nobody really knows anything about." Widespread, comprehensive ignorance is the necessary condition for buzz, which is why it's so popular in Hollywood. And *The Operator* was the occasion for lots of buzz; only a handful of people, most of them in show business, had access to the manuscript, and it's not clear how many of them could read. Rumors circulated that the book was full of salacious material about David's private life, packed with horrifying stories of his shady business dealings, throbbing with tales of deceit and double-dealing and all-purpose creepiness. Random House ordered up an extra-large printing—eighty thousand copies. It rented a vast billboard in the heart of the Sunset strip. The tension was unbearable; the buzz was thunderous. And then, and then . . . people started to get copies of the book. People started to read it.

Top: Steve Antin, Geffen, and Cher in 1983. Bottom: Geffen at an award banquet in 1992.

Reviews began appearing early last month. They were unkind. *Entertainment Weekly* complained that *The Operator* "isn't exactly *War and Peace*," which I'm almost certain is intended as an insult. Tom King, said *Entertainment Weekly*, "just doesn't convey the gritty reality of the business. . . . His juicy bits are pretty much the stuff of trivia—Geffen's collagen injections, colorless statements from old boyfriends, and not much else." *Variety* was disappointed, too. "King treads prudishly over Geffen's sex life," lamented the show-biz bible. Then it complained that King should have "embroidered this book with grander ideas—some nuanced vision of the zeitgeist that swept Geffen to power."

You're in trouble when *Variety* thinks your book lacks intellectual rigor. You're in trouble when *Entertainment Weekly* thinks your collagen-injection stories are trivial. And sure enough, sales of *The Operator*, in the six weeks since its release, have been far below expectations. It initially sold well in Los Angeles, then didn't. It touched the lowest rung of the *New York Times* bestseller list, then quickly fell away. It failed to rise to *USA Today*'s list of the fifty top selling books. There have been bigger publishing fiascoes, but at the very least *The Operator* is unlikely to earn back the generous $700,000 advance that Random House paid Tom King.

There are many possible reasons for this. For one thing, the reviews are onto something: *The Operator*—whether considered as a straight biography, a business book, or a chronicle of show biz played out at the highest levels—really

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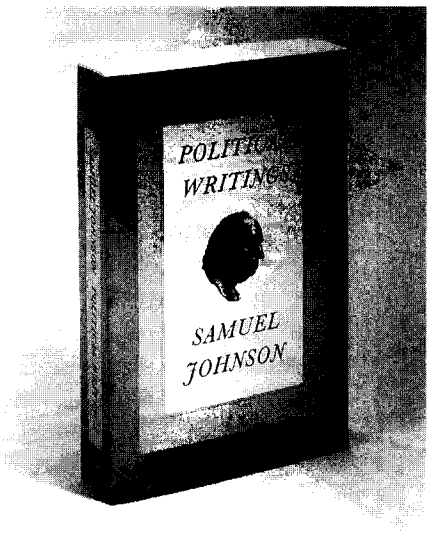

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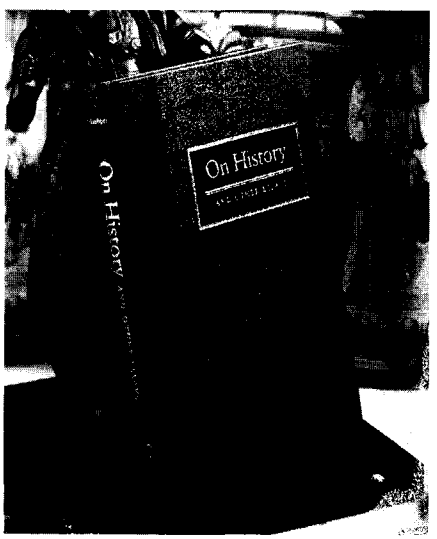

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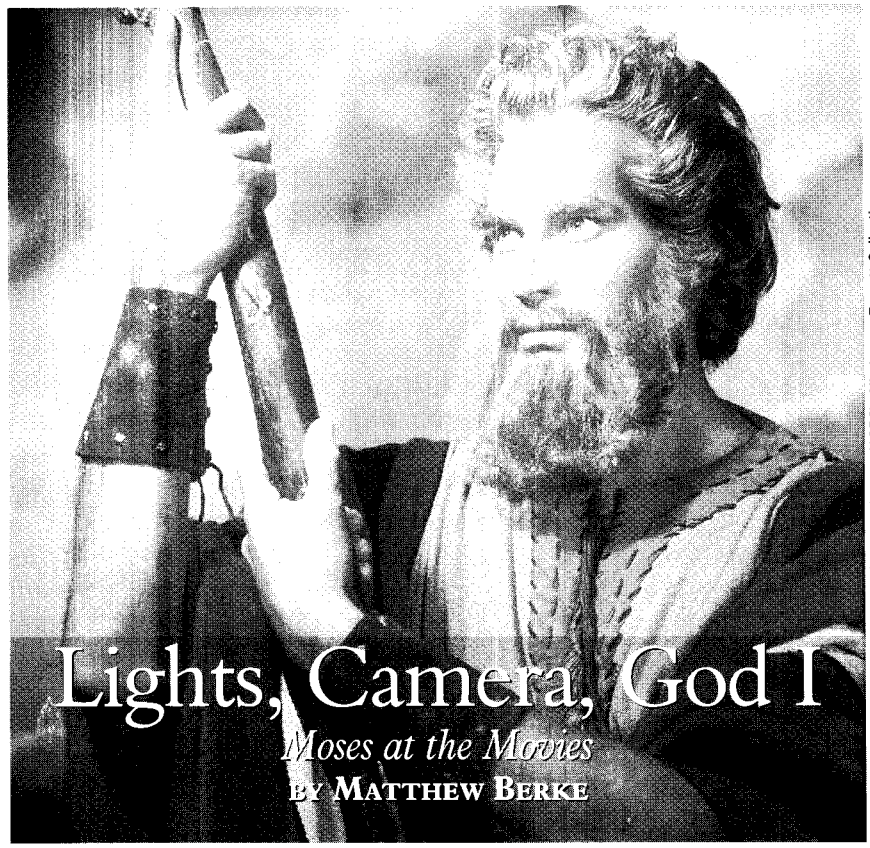
does stink. King lacks the storyteller's gift. He writes badly and he writes long. He loses the reader's sympathy almost immediately. In his foreword, for no apparent reason beyond the thrill of name-dropping, he recounts his efforts to make Joni Mitchell—an old pal of Geffen's, now an enemy—sit for an interview.

"I wrote her yet another letter and—at the suggestion of a friend who had heard Mitchell mention in a National Public Radio interview that her cat Nietzsche had learned to dance—I sent a box of gourmet cat treats to her home in Bel-Air. She never responded." It's one thing to suck up to a potential source by buying her gourmet kitty treats; reporters frequently demean themselves for their art. It's another thing to brag about it.

The most plausible explanation for the book's commercial failure, however, must be Geffen himself. Even in King's lifeless rendering he is a repellent fellow. His career is a trail of atrocities, raising the question of why anyone would want to read about him at a length of 670 pages. Consider a few of his contributions to cultural life (I'm picking from the book at random). For one brief moment in the mid-1970s, it appeared that Cher's career would finally come to an end; Geffen single-handedly revived it, and she is with us to this day. He launched the Southern California "singer-songwriter" movement, which makes him responsible for Dan Fogelberg. He brought *Cats* to Broadway. He was involved in the making of "Horse with No Name." He discovered Sonic Youth and Nirvana and became the foremost promoter of grunge. He put up the money for a Bruce Willis movie. He released several records by Guns N' Roses. He gave Courtney Love her first big break. On and on it goes. David Geffen has a lot to answer for.

Several years ago a protégé of Geffen's, tottering toward a nervous breakdown, went to see a psychiatrist. After listening for hours to her lamentations, the analyst offered four words of advice: "No . . . More . . . David . . . Geffen."

The book-buyers of America are saying the same. ◆



Charlton Heston as Moses in *The Ten Commandments* (1956). All photos: Everett Collection.

Lights, Camera, God!

Moses at the Movies

BY MATTHEW BERKE

It's easy to ridicule Bible movies—and fun, too, because in a sense, they're all blasphemous and silly. The piety is phony, and the titillation and violence hypocritical. The grandiloquent dialogue blended with modern slang is the stuff of high camp, and the miracles glorify cinematic technology rather than God's power. So why can't we seem to avoid these movies?

There are perhaps two dozen major films based on Hebrew Scripture (the Old Testament, as Christians call it). But curiously, only five deal with its central event: Israel's deliverance from Egypt and acceptance of God's law, the celebration of which begins this week with Passover and ends seven weeks later with *Shavuot*. Perhaps Hollywood has shied away from the story because it requires displaying God's voice and miracles. More likely, the problem has been the serious moral and theological issues the story raises: What is this freedom and this law granted by God to Israel? Why is freedom rooted in law? To what extent are law and freedom in tension?

It's an understatement to say that cinema is not the principal means for exploring such questions. And yet, within their limits, these films are interesting and enjoyable. It turns out that we can't entirely avoid these movies because they work, in their way, toward answers not entirely unfaithful to the scriptural texts or the communities that live by them.

Back in 1923, Cecil B. DeMille made a silent film called *The Ten Commandments*. It was a portent of things to come, with DeMille already displaying his penchants for grandiosity and moral minimalism. For all the extravagance that made it notorious at the time, this 1923 version of *The Ten Commandments* is an extremely abridged biblical drama: a little hard bondage in Egypt and just one plague. DeMille presents only forty minutes of actual Bible material, mainly as a prologue to his movie's real story: a modern parable about what happens when man abandons God's law, revolving around two brothers, Johnny and Danny McTavish, the former moral and pious, the latter a scoffer who lives for pleasure and gain. You can pretty much guess what happens.

But then in 1956, DeMille returned to the Book of Exodus to make Hollywood's most famous Bible movie: the technicolor extravaganza, *The Ten Commandments*. A sword-and-sandal epic lasting over three and a half hours, it contains everything an audience could want in a spectacular: colossal sets, lav-

Matthew Berke is managing editor of First Things.

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ish costumes, major stars, a cast of thousands, dazzling special effects, a titanic struggle between good and evil, and religious piety summoned at a moment's notice. (About DeMille's huge budget, one Hollywood observer joked, "It makes you realize what God could've done if He'd had the money.")

For some viewers today, *The Ten Commandments* is simply an artifact of mid-century American overconfidence and excess. Charlton Heston was cast because he had the ruggedly handsome features of an American frontiersman; also, when bearded, he resembled Michelangelo's statue of Moses. ("If it's good enough for Michelangelo," DeMille said, "it's good enough for me.") Yul Brynner, fresh from his Broadway performance in *The King and I*, makes his screen debut as pharaoh and plays it with the same open-shirt-hands-on-hips arrogance he patented as the King of Siam. Edward G. Robinson gives his *Little Caesar* best as Dathan, a Jewish traitor. Anne Baxter plays Nefretiri as a modern American sex kitten; she nearly steals the show when she laments, "Oh Moses, Moses! You stubborn, splendid, adorable fool!" (Also, don't miss the scene in which Jethro's daughters, portrayed as sex-starved sorority girls, discover an exhausted Moses near their father's well. When one sister speculates that the stranger is Egyptian, another replies, "Who cares? He's a MAN!")

The special effects are more impressive as camera tricks than evocations of God's power. The Red Sea looks like the gelatin mold it is, while DeMille's Burning Bush looks like a fake burning log. The more serious problem, however, is not the primitive special effects, but the woodenly literal reading of Scripture that inspired them. Perhaps even worse is the effect those miracles have: Once Moses gets his marching orders from God, for instance, he seems fixed in a weird trance for the last two hours of the movie—no longer speaking but shouting everything portentously and pompously. At the orgy around the Golden Calf—the Israelite men transformed into lusty satyrs and the women into half-naked girls out of *L'il Abner*—Moses explodes, "It is the sound of *song*! And *revelry*!" Also, for some reason, he suddenly sports a huge, luxurious main of hair (tastefully highlighted).

Yet for those able to get past the kitsch, there is a payoff. DeMille seems to believe that God exists and that His will is the basis for just law, without which there is no freedom. DeMille actually makes a cameo appearance at the beginning of the film; stepping out from behind heavy theater curtains, he announces, "The theme of this picture is whether men are to be ruled by God's law or whether they are to be ruled by the whims of a dictator like Rameses. Are men the property of the state, or are they free souls, under God?"

Of course, DeMille's "story of the birth of freedom" gets a few millennia ahead of itself. Universal freedom may

have its historical *conception* here, but Israel's deliverance from Egypt is the story of only one people's release, and even then, only to serve God. DeMille assumes an identity between biblical and modern American freedom. His "law" is a minimal affair, reflecting a certain kind of Protestant piety in which a human heart filled with the divine grace proclaimed in the New Testament no longer needs the rigid and detailed instruction of the Old Testament.

By the mid-1960s, it was no longer possible to make a DeMille-style costume pageant, partly because of rising production costs but also because of changing sensibilities. *Moses—The Lawgiver*, a British-Italian collaboration starring Burt Lancaster, is very much a product of the 1970s. Shot in Italy and Israel, it made its American debut on CBS television in June 1975, in six hour-long installments. A mercifully compressed two-and-a-half-hour version for theaters was reentitled *Moses*.

The film has an artsy look that is partly naturalistic, partly hallucinogenic (note the clipped, discontinuous camera shots, especially at the beginning). A soft, golden lighting gives one the feel of watching something through the haze of myth and history. But viewers are frequently jolted out of this dreamy state into a starker reality—by the harrowing massacre of the Hebrew firstborn, for instance, and by the plagues, which, though less spectacular than DeMille's, seem more terrifying.

While it's nice to be relieved of bombast, this small-scale story has its own drawbacks. Egypt looks more like a village than an empire: There are hardly any pyramids in sight, and the royal palace could be a catering hall easily redecorated for the bar mitzvah party scheduled later that evening. There's little sense that the drama being played out is of enormous significance. The scenes of hard labor are few and perfunctory, lacking *The Ten Commandments*' melodramatic (but accurate) narration of the Israelites as "children of misery," a people making mortar in an "inferno of mud and straw."

Courageously, or perhaps foolishly, *Moses* attempts a deeper study of commandment and covenant than DeMille dared. "The law" here is not an easygoing top ten, but an elaborate code whose specificity and toughness is made shockingly vivid. Where *The Ten Commandments* shows only general divine wrath over the Golden Calf incident, *Moses* displays the retribution of the Levites, members of the priestly class who execute rebels by shooting them with arrows or pushing them off cliffs. Also depicted is the story from Numbers 15, in which a man is sentenced to death by stoning for gathering firewood on the Sabbath. The movie makes the story worse by having Moses render the verdict after a casual glance at a statute book; then he tops it off with an observation that "The law is the law." (In the actual Bible, God issues the verdict.)

Thus, though *Moses* doesn't sugarcoat Scripture, it falls into the equally dan-

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gerous error of hypertextualism. Traditional Judaism and Christianity have not, by and large, understood every biblical passage in a literal way; the Bible has always been a document read through communities of interpretation, which soften or allegorize the hard passages. *Moses* leaves the erroneous sense that such cruel punishments were normative, when the opposite is closer to the truth. *Moses* deserves credit for confronting difficult scriptural passages, but it's not up to the task of working them through.

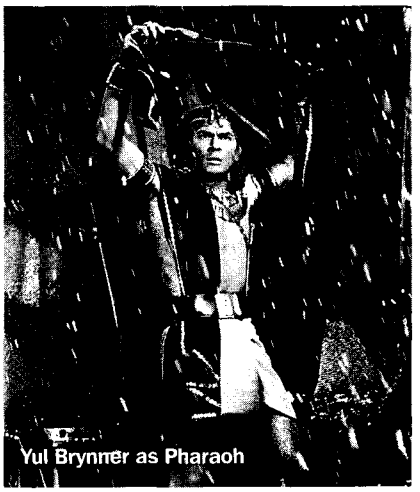
When a new movie entitled *Moses*, starring Ben Kingsley, debuted on TNT during Passover/Easter week of 1996, it drew 2.3 million viewers—a fraction of the 10.6 million who tuned in to ABC for yet another showing of *The Ten Commandments*. Like the Burt Lancaster *Moses*, TNT's is a laid-back, small-scale production that doesn't hit you over the head with epic meaning. Kingsley's Moses, more than any other, actually grows as a person, his spiritual state slowly being transformed as he internalizes what is commanded as law.

Unlike Heston's "haughty and handsome" prince, Kingsley's young Moses is a callow, insecure outsider. Though raised in the royal court, he feels himself neither Egyptian nor Hebrew. He remains tentative and unformed even after God reveals Himself in the Burning Bush. Unlike Heston—who is zapped into a kind of zombie prophet—Kingsley tells the people, "I *believe* God spoke to me." His fellow Israelites had been expecting something more definite.

But as God continues to keep His word, Moses grows. His faith exists in tension with his fears, but he comes to trust God above his own faculties. At the Red Sea, for example, he must wait with raised staff for hours before the waters part. When the miracle finally happens, the faithless multitude prostrates itself in astonishment and awe, but Moses bursts out laughing—not surprised but exhilarated and thrilled.

Though he angrily reproves the Israelites for sin and rebellion, it is clear that this Moses loves the people: He weeps when punishment is inflicted on them, whether by God or by the Levites. When his sister Miriam is stricken with a skin disease for blasphemy, Moses visits and comforts her. The seemingly harsh punishment is shown not as divine bullying but as a redemptive, healing process by which those who excommunicate themselves from the covenant can be brought back. Jethro, Moses' adviser, gives voice to this notion of law as the way to freedom: "Laws are not sufficient by themselves. The people . . . must learn to want to follow the law without fear. . . . When they have learned that, they will truly be free."

The Prince of Egypt, a 1998 DreamWorks production, represents a return


Yul Brynner as Pharaoh

to the 1950s style of grand biblical epic. An animated cartoon, it includes some of the best artwork ever put on screen, particularly the pyramids and the gorgeously colored desert vistas and skies; it also breaks new ground in giving a three-dimensional appearance to animation. In this retelling, Moses and Rameses grow up together not as mortal enemies but as brothers—a couple of hunky teenage jocks who like to hot-rod their chariots around the pyramids, causing mayhem.

Moses' carefree youth ends when, by chance, he meets Aaron and Miriam, his real brother and sister, and the truth of his Hebrew origins comes out. Moses, desperately shaken, retreats to the palace wall which bears a pictographic record of the dynasty, and discovers the truth about his adoptive father, the pharaoh, who once ordered the murder of all Hebrew firstborn. The hieroglyphic characters come to life and, in an awesome display of animation artistry, reenact the slaughter. (It's also a brilliant strategy for telling children the story without scaring them to death.)

Zipporah here is not the solid, modest character portrayed by Yvonne De Carlo in *The Ten Commandments* but the stereotypical feminist heroine of Disney—and now, DreamWorks—productions: She's svelte and sexy, fiercely independent and incredibly athletic. When Moses hears God's voice out of the Burning Bush, commanding him to return to Egypt to free his people, he briefly demurs, and the flames flare angrily. But you can be sure God didn't mean anything by it: In this cartoon version, God doesn't interfere in people's lives, except to make sure they're free. Which brings up the real narrative problem with *The Prince of Egypt*: Moses is merely a liberator, not a lawgiver. The film has no interest in law, let alone in all its detailed, nettlesome rules.

Not surprisingly, the Israelites never seem to have any difficulty managing their freedom: There's no blasphemy or rebellion, not even a Golden Calf. When they receive the Commandments, there's no mention of law; the tablets are held up at the end as a kind of icon or idol. In the film's final spoken words, Zipporah declares, "Look at your people, Moses. They are free!" This message is reinforced by the movie's large, lush musical score, particularly the pop-chart power tune "When You Believe," which emphasizes human rather than divine power: *Who knows what miracles you can achieve, / When you believe.*

But one shouldn't be too hard on *The Prince of Egypt*. The argument against such a film—that it can mislead viewers into thinking they have the real story without studying the book—seems unpersuasive, since even the reading of Scripture, without the interpretive prism of a religious community, can be misleading. If the Bible itself is not a sufficient account of Bible stories, surely we should adjust our expectations for motion pictures. That said, the old cliché still holds: Read the book before you see the movie. ♦

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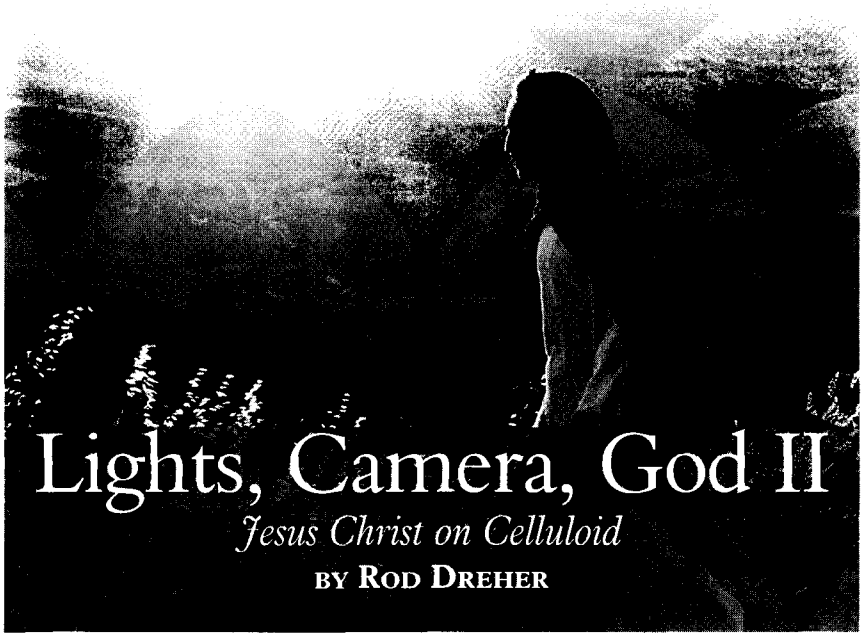

Pasolini's *The Gospel According to St. Matthew* (1964). Everett Collection.

Lights, Camera, God II

Jesus Christ on Celluloid

BY ROD DREHER

Some Christians prepare for Easter by taking on a special penance for Lent. Me, I've been watching Jesus movies for what seems forty days and forty nights.

Why are good Jesus movies so rare? With the exception of Franco Zeffirelli's 1977 TV miniseries *Jesus of Nazareth*, a quality drama that strikes a reasonable balance, gospel films have either been pious sword-and-sandal schlock or highly stylized revisionist narratives that interpret Jesus according to contemporary socio-political agendas. John Wayne playing a drawling Roman centurion in *The Greatest Story Ever Told*, or Willem Dafoe playing Jesus as a sex-haunted mama's boy in *The Last Temptation of Christ*: Pick your poison, pilgrim.

Part of the problem lies in the story itself: The gospels are novelistic rather than cinematic. The more serious challenge, however, is that audiences know the Christ story too well. "How to tell this story?" a young actor-director asks in the opening lines of Denys Arcand's *Jesus of Montreal*. "The most famous of all, one we think we all know?"

Though D.W. Griffith included a truncated treatment in his landmark 1916 film *Intolerance*, it fell to Cecil B. DeMille to do the first full-length film. DeMille's silent 1927 *The King of Kings* puts a tabloid spin on the biblical account, hiding some fairly lurid material behind a veil of mawkish piety—and setting a standard for Bible movies that would hold for almost a half century.

The film's title card, which bears DeMille's signature, tells us that the director intends *The King of Kings* to help fulfill the "Great Commission" Christ issues in Matthew 28:19: "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations." That settled, DeMille takes us into the lair of Mary Magdalene, a swank courtesan who entertains noble layabouts in her posh pleasure palace. The Herodian hottie sports nothing but rhinestones on an exposed gazonga, and pouts that some Nazarene carpenter has stolen the attentions of her lover Judas Iscariot. She summons her zebra-drawn chariot, and sallies forth to get back her man.

This must have made quite an impression on 1920s audiences. And lo, when the Magdalene does meet Jesus, he casts out her seven demons (giving DeMille an opportunity to wow the viewers with primitive special effects) and makes her a follower. DeMille ratchets up the spectacle by causing a cage of light to descend over a blind child healed by Jesus. This stern, pompadoured Christ (played by H.B. Warner) is so revered by the filmmaker that he has a permanent halo and always appears to be covered with a thin film of white dust.

The King of Kings was the last Hollywood film biography of Jesus for over thirty years. In the 1950s, the golden age of biblical epics, Jesus made only cameo appearances in a pair of Hollywood blockbusters. In *The Robe* (1953), Richard Burton portrays a centurion at Calvary who couldn't shake the horror of what he had seen there. The William Wyler-directed *Ben-Hur* (1959) stars Charlton Heston as a hotheaded Judean prince transformed by two fleeting encounters with the faceless, merciful Christ.

Clearly inspired by *Ben-Hur*'s eleven Oscars, Hollywood resurrected the Jesus genre in 1961, releasing the gasbag epic *King of Kings*. Director Nicholas Ray sets the scene with a clash between Jewish guerrillas and Roman soldiers. What might have been a laudable attempt to place Jesus in a political context quickly proves to be an excuse to stage a sword fight—which, despite the film's corny religiosity, remains pretty much what *King of Kings* is about. Ray apparently blew his budget on impressive sets; the no-name actors prove you get what you pay for. John the Baptist looks like Conway Twitty in caveman drag. Blandoid Jesus is as dull and unfocused as the story line, with its woebegone attempts to jazz up the gospel with Palestinian intrigue centering around a conflict between revolutionary Barabbas ("the Messiah of War") and Jesus ("the Messiah of Peace").

The Barnum-like title of *The Greatest Story Ever Told* (1965) promises the same degree of panoramic grandiosity, with the gruesome added attraction of "an all-star cast." We're talking Shelley Winters as the Woman of No Name! Pat Boone as the Young Man at the Tomb! Telly Savalas as Pontius Pilate, baby! Let joy be unconfined. But the movie is better than anything one has a right to expect. It's not gaudy, it's reasonably well acted, and director George Stevens has a fine pictorial eye. But the epic sinks under the weight of its own title. It's a long slog from Bethlehem to Calvary, made so by the pervasive air of ponderous solemnity.

After such rich, empty-calorie fare, Italian neo-realist filmmaker Pier Paolo Pasolini's stripped-down *The Gospel According to St. Matthew* (1964) hits you like a sharp shot of scalding espresso. Compared with the rococo pageantry of

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Everett Collection

Above: The disciples dance in Godspell *(1973). Left: H.B. Warner as Jesus in* The King of Kings *(1927). Opposite page: Cecil B. DeMille poses with a prop chalice in 1944.*

the Hollywood sagas, Pasolini's film is a model of Carthusian austerity. Pasolini cast aside expensive costumes and elaborate sets, distracting fictional inventions and all-star casts. On the far side of DeMillenarianism, the movie could hardly be more simple. Filmed in southern Italy, using rough-hewn peasants for extras, its stark black-and-white images advance a literal retelling of the Book of Matthew. Every word in the script comes straight from the Bible. Jesus (Enrique Irazoqui) storms hither and yon, preaching parables and issuing condemnations of the priestly caste. This is a fighting Jesus, an angry Jesus, a spiritual leveler and scourge of the high and mighty.

It comes as no surprise, then, to learn that Pasolini was a devout Marxist who saw Christ as a sort of Palestinian Spartacus. While his bracing take is perhaps preferable to the more conventionally reverential Hollywood films, the lack of tenderness in Pasolini's Jesus rings false. What's more, the thin, somewhat effeminate Irazoqui is badly miscast. He's a prisspot who rails at his followers like a tyrannical Broadway choreographer, and it's difficult to imagine why anyone, least of all burly Galilean fishermen, would follow this scold. In any case, Pasolini's picture is more likely to be admired by professors and critics than churchgoers. Its slavish fidelity highlights the Bible's cinematic limitations. Is this pedantic dullardry really more vital than the lumbering Technicolor warhorses of Hollywood?

For all its would-be radicalism, *The Gospel According to St. Matthew* is antique compared with the next wave of Jesus movies. The rise of the counterculture and the concomitant upheaval in religious thinking gave us two of the most embarrassing artifacts of the 1970s: *Godspell* and *Jesus Christ Superstar*. Both began as hit Broadway musicals, and found their way onto the big screen in 1973. *Jesus Christ Superstar*, a rock opera written by Andrew Lloyd Webber and Tim Rice, is the more interesting of the two, in the same way that Wilma Flintstone is more intriguing than Betty Rubble. *Jesus Christ Superstar* interprets the life of Christ as celebrity culture. In the film's view, Jesus (Ted Neeley) was the Judean equivalent of a gifted teacher whose fame got too big for him to handle. His antagonist is Judas Iscariot (Carl Anderson), a disciple who wants to believe Jesus is the Messiah, but cannot.

The musical makes no pretense of believing that Jesus is the Son of God. Rather, it offers a critique of the star-making phenomenon, examining why people need to believe in saviors and suggesting that one achieves immortality only through lasting fame. It's a timely, if theologically unacceptable, observation. But you have to sit through the aural equivalent of a lashing at the pillar in Lloyd Webber's dreadful electric-guitar melodies, which sound like cats being strangled between the strings of a Stratocaster.

Better that than the achingly winsome *Godspell*, the only Jesus movie that makes you think the Sanhedrin may have had a point. Set in contemporary New York City, *Godspell* gives us Jesus and the Apostles as a multicultural troupe of slap-happy ninnies who cavort around town in clown get-ups learning parables while they do shtick. Think "Teletubbies at prayer." Behold, the *ne plus ultra* of hippy-dippy, the apotheosis of twee. John the Baptist looks like an undiscovered Bee Gee. Our Lord is a paleface dork with a beatific grin, an Art Garfunkel afro, and a greasepaint heart on his forehead. It's downhill from there, into one of the most cringeworthy motion pictures ever made (though the Stephen Schwartz score is undeniably catchy). To endure this movie is to think in sorrow and pity of three decades of church youth groups forced to watch

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this thing on all-night retreats, silently resolving to join up with the heathens at the first opportunity.

Those ludicrous excesses aside, changing times made it possible for Franco Zeffirelli to focus on Jesus' humanity within a generally orthodox theological context in his six-hour 1977 miniseries *Jesus of Nazareth*. This is a life of Jesus that's scrupulously realistic and spiritually serious, yet presented on an intimate scale. Zeffirelli is not preoccupied with the showmanship of the sword-and-sandal era, and he's helped by the medium of television, which is more amenable to deemphasizing the pictorial.

Zeffirelli pictures Jesus as the Palestinian Jew who taught in synagogues though he scandalized the priests at times. The film is particularly strong in developing the relation of Christ to his disciples, and includes absorbing theological debates among temple clerics over who Jesus really is. There's enough fictional invention here to flesh out the gospel accounts and make them interesting, but the script never strays from the spirit of Scripture. Robert Powell's tremendously astute portrayal of Jesus is the best ever filmed, but I'm afraid that's faint praise. His charismatic Jesus projects a gentle but firm authority, though his Oxbridge accent can be off-putting. For all its dramaturgical success, though, *Jesus of Nazareth* drags, simply because it's hard to sit through six hours when you know everything that's going to happen next.

Jesus of Nazareth was the last major production that attempted a broadly accessible, reasonably orthodox telling of the life of Christ. The year 1979 saw an unholy row develop over Monty Python's *Life of Brian*—a largely misunderstood religious satire by Britain's irreverent comedy troupe, which poked fun at messianism in general and pop culture's tacky treatment of serious religious themes. Public officials in Baton Rouge and similar locales tried to ban the film.

But the *Life of Brian* brouhaha, and a similar squabble over Jean-Luc Godard's blasphemous *Hail, Mary* (1985) were skirmishes compared with the battle over Martin Scorsese's *The Last Temptation of Christ* (1988). Scorsese based his movie on the Nikos Kazantzakis novel, in which the Greek writer imagined a sinful Jesus wracked by nightmare visions, extreme doubt, and sexual agonies. The film comes with a disclaimer saying it is "not based upon the gospels," but is instead a fictional exploration of the "eternal conflict" between spirit and flesh.

Well. Willem Dafoe plays Jesus as a carpenter who builds crosses for the Romans and is a neurotic weakling, liar,

and coward: "I'm afraid of everything. I never tell the truth. I don't have the courage." He's a peripatetic fruitcake who "finds" himself in the course of his journeys—a New Age goonybird more suited for Malibu than Nazareth. Ironically, what seemed to upset most protesters was the scene in which the crucified Jesus hallucinates the normal life he would have if he came down from the Cross—a life that includes sex with Mary Magdalene, kids, and a mortgage. There is nothing particularly heterodox about this; orthodox Christian theology holds that Jesus was tempted by all things, but rejected them, as he does this final temptation.

Still, there's no gainsaying the film's offensiveness. And *The Last Temptation of Christ* fails miserably as storytelling. It reveals how little room there is for artistic improvisation on the gospel story. It's a futile exercise in psychobiography and historical revisionism.

Canadian filmmaker Denys Arcand's French-language *Jesus of Montreal* (1989) questions the whole enterprise of telling Jesus' story. The film's hero, Daniel Coulombe (Lothaire Bluteau), is a little-known actor commissioned to update a local Passion Play that has gotten stodgy.

Daniel brings together a band of nobodies, and they rewrite the story of Christ's suffering and death to make it relevant for modern audiences. The revisionist version claims Jesus was the illegitimate son of a Roman soldier. He denies his status as the Messiah and urges his followers to "seek salvation within yourself." It also portrays the Resurrection as a psychological event.

This being a left-wing secularist allegory, the corrupt religious establishment tries to shut down the brave young truth-tellers, and the Satan figure appears as a slick Montreal lawyer who tempts Daniel to capitalize on his growing fame. When the hero dies tragically, the movie ends with spurious heroic legends spreading about Daniel's life and his followers making a deal with the devil to build a theater (read: a church) in his memory.

Arcand's boilerplate skepticism about Christianity is less interesting than what his movie says about the knowability of Jesus through art and religion. The Passion Play within the movie is conditioned by the prejudices and predilections of its authors and its audience. The real story is what happens to Daniel away from the outdoor stage. He begins living the gospel, standing up for the exploited and resisting offers to sell out for worldly gain or compromise his message to protect his hide.

Though its humanistic theology is skewed and unreliable, *Jesus of Montreal* suggests that in the end, the only sure way to understand Jesus is not through fictional representations of his life, but in living by his teachings. Considering the dispiriting history of Jesus in film, that's sage advice. As Samuel Johnson put it, when he complained about religious poetry, "The ideas of Christian theology are too simple for eloquence, too sacred for fiction, and too majestic for ornament." And too complex and difficult for the movies. ♦

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ABC News producers helped prepare actor Leonardo DiCaprio for his interview with President Clinton, to air on ABC's upcoming Earth Day special.

—*News item*

Parody

abc

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MEMO

To: Leo
From: Producers, "Earth Day Special"
Re: Tomorrow's interview

Thanks so much for your "input" about the upcoming interview. We hope, Leo, that you appreciate the gravity of this assignment. You have become a representative of one of the world's most respected news-gathering organizations, ABC News. Journalism is a craft, Leo—at once a science and an art. It is democracy's indispensable institution, the sacred means by which a free people accomplishes the miracle of self-government. This is not "show biz." We allow no room for artifice or sham.

So you're bringing your own make-up girl? Great! But we think you'll find that our hair people are simply the best in the craft. (Sam Donaldson insists on doing his own, and look what happens!) We do have some reservations about your game plan, though. For example, we really think you should wear shoes. And we would prefer that you wear a tie, but not one that lights up. Also, you're correct that visitors often present the president with a small gift after an Oval Office interview. But none of your colleagues here at ABC News thinks a hookah is appropriate, no matter how "boss" it is. Ask other correspondents how they've handled the situation. Peter Jennings, we believe, gave the president a tasteful etching. Diane Sawyer gave the president her phone number.

Your proposed questions look fine. Just a few "tweaks" on wording, etc.:

* We do not recommend referring to the president as "dude."

* Mentioning Kate Winslet is indeed a good way to break the ice. But do not mention her "hooters," as you called them. Let the president take the initiative in that discussion.

* We would suggest that you not refer to the Secret Service as "the president's very own pussy posse." The Secret Service is a time-honored institution with myriad responsibilities and this is only one of them.

Tomorrow, Leo, as heir to our proud tradition, you will stand on the shoulders of giants. You join our roll call of honor: Geraldo Rivera. Hugh Downs. Joan Lunden. Elizabeth Vargas. Names that pretty much define journalism here at ABC. And now we add DiCaprio to the list. Break a leg, dude!

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Facing Up to Kosova

Norman M. Naimark is a senior fellow at the Hoover Institution and the Walter and Florence McDonnell Professor in East European Studies at Stanford University.

This is a bad time to argue about whether or not we should have bombed the Serbs and placed troops in Kosova. It is an even worse time to talk about reducing the number of troops and resources we are willing to commit to the United Nations operation. Although Europe should handle security problems in its own backyard, it is not yet capable of doing so. Kosova is in crisis, and there is no alternative; the United States *must* contribute to its resolution. We accepted that responsibility when we bombed the Serbs and moved in NATO forces.

We occupied Kosova; now we need to help liberate it from chaos, violence, poverty, and maladministration. This means taking control of the province and—in cooperation with Kosovar Albanian and Serbian democrats—leading it in measured stages to independence. This also means taking resolute action against those who would disturb the peace, whether it is Serbian vigilantes in northern Mitrovica or Albanian "freedom fighters" (the UCPMB) in the Presevo Valley in southern Serbia, who receive weapons and supplies from eastern Kosova. Both groups must be disarmed and, if necessary, their leaders incarcerated.

We must shed the mythology, most recently expressed by NATO secretary-general Lord Robertson, that "we are rebuilding a multi-ethnic democracy in [Kosova]." Such a society never existed in Kosova in the first place, and now, after more than a decade of intense and bloody national struggle, including fierce Serbian ethnic cleansing campaigns in 1998–99, no such society can emerge.

Redrawing the boundaries of Kosova will only encourage demands for new boundaries all over the region. Partition holds the same dangers. Therefore, Kosova must eventually emerge as an independent country within its present borders. That means that the Serbs who are there have to be protected and that they must have internationally mandated access to their holy monasteries. But they must accommodate to a Kosovar Albanian state or leave, as many Kosovar Serbs already have. The same is true for the Albanians in the Presevo Valley: They must either live in Serbia in peace or leave on their own, again, as many already have. Under no circumstances, however, can ethnic cleansing be condoned or aided. Formal population transfers usually cause more problems than they solve.

Under Western tutelage, **an independent Kosova could help stabilize the region,** especially Macedonia and Albania. Large injections of capital from the European Union and the United States are endangered by the present uncertainty about Kosova's fate. A high-profile presence of NATO and the United States in Kosova might discourage Milosevic from his present attempts to destabilize Montenegro.

The Serbian loss of Kosova, legitimated by Milosevic's wanton aggression in the region, might also help the Serbian opposition remove him from power. The West could then reach out to Serbia to bring the country back to normalcy and its rightful place in the European community. Over the past decade, indecision in the Balkans has produced nothing but catastrophe.

— Norman M. Naimark

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